

THE
BLIND
MUSICIAN

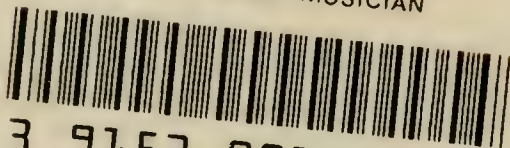


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KOROLENKO # BLIND MUSICIAN



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W. V. M. Bentley -

March 1899.

V. P. M. -

THE
BLIND MUSICIAN

BY
VLADIMIR KOROLENKO

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

By ALINE DELANO

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY GEORGE KENNAN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY EDMUND H. GARRETT

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IN this sketch, called by Korolenko "a psychological study," the author has attempted to analyze the inner life of the blind. He has undertaken to lay before the reader not only the psychological processes in the mind of the blind, but their suffering from the lack of sight as well, uncomplicated by any untoward circumstances.

To accomplish this he has placed his hero in most favorable, nay, almost exceptional conditions. The subjects for this study are a blind girl, whom the author had known as a child; a boy, a pupil of his, who was gradually losing his sight;

and a professional musician, blind from his birth, intellectually gifted, scholarly, and refined.

Upon the completion of my translation, I submitted it to Mr. M. Anagnos, of the Perkins Institution for the blind, and received from him the following note, which he has kindly permitted me to make public: —

MY DEAR MADAM, — I have read, with due care and deep interest, your translation of Vladimir Korolenko's book, entitled "The Blind Musician," and I take great pleasure in being able to say that the story, although very simple both in form and substance, is conceived and elaborated with a masterly skill. It is ingenious in construction, artistic in execution, and full of imaginative vigor. The author shows a keen appreciation of what is charming and beautiful in Nature and a fine power of analysis. His ideas on the intellectual development and physical training of the blind are correct, and cannot

but deepen the interest of the reader in the various phases of the story. That some of his psychological observations, derived from the study of a limited number of cases, represent individual characteristics or idiosyncrasies which cannot be applied to all persons bereft of the visual sense, in no wise detracts from the value of the work. . . .

Sincerely yours,

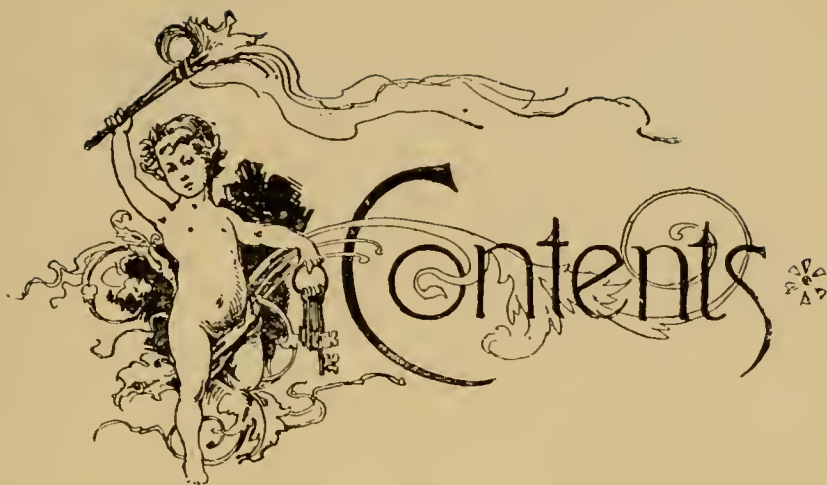
M. ANAGNOS.

May this simple story, written from the heart, reach the heart of him who reads it!

ALINE DELANO.

BOSTON, MASS.

June, 1890.



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IT affords me great pleasure to link my name with that of Vladimir Korolenko by writing a few words in the form of an introduction to the translation of that gifted young author's "Blind Musician," which is now to appear for the first time in English.

I knew Korolenko by reputation and by his work long before I made his personal acquaintance. While engaged in making an investigation of the exile system in Siberia, I met many of his banished friends and comrades; and my attention was first called by them to the series of graphic sketches of Siberian life and experience that he was then publishing in

“Russian Thought,” “The Northern Messenger,” the “Annals of the Fatherland,” and other Russian periodicals. I read them carefully, and formed from them at once a high opinion of the author’s character and talent.

Upon my return from Siberia in the summer of 1886, I stopped for a few days in the old Tartar town of Nizhni Novgorod on the Volga (where Mr. Korolenko was then living), for the express purpose of calling upon a writer whose life and whose work had so deeply interested me. I need not describe the impression that he made upon me further than to say, that a feeling of warm personal regard and esteem for the man was soon added to the admiration that I already had for him as a literary artist. Mr. Korolenko seems to me to represent the most liberal, the most progressive, and

the most sincerely patriotic type of young Russian manhood. The influence that he has exerted, personally and by his writings, has always been on the side of liberty, humanity, and justice; and there could hardly be a more significant commentary upon the existing form of government in Russia than the fact that this talented author, before he was thirty-five years of age, had been four times banished from his home to remote parts of the empire, without even the form of a judicial trial, and had twice been sent as a political exile to Siberia. If he had been an active revolutionist like Lopatin, or even a writer upon prohibited social and political subjects like Chernishèfski, his banishment to Siberia would have been more comprehensible; but he was neither one nor the other. He was removed to the province of Vòlogda, and

afterward to the province of Viatka, merely because the police regarded him as a “ne-blagonadëzhni” (politically untrustworthy person), and then he was exiled to Siberia as a result of a stupid police blunder. When, after years of hardship and privation, he finally returned to his home, he was called upon to take the oath of allegiance to Alexander III., and to swear that he would betray every one of his friends or acquaintances whom he knew to be engaged in revolutionary or anti-Government work. No conscientious and self-respecting man could take such an oath, and Mr. Korolenko, of course, declined to do it. He was thereupon exiled by administrative process to the East-Siberian province of Yakutsk, where in a wretched Yakut “ooloos” he lived for three years, and where he made some of the character studies, such as “The Va-

grant " and " Makàr's Dream," that first attracted to him the attention of the Russian reading public.

Mr. Korolenko has not thus far published anything like a long and carefully worked out novel of Russian life; but the fault is not his own. He wrote such a novel under the title "Pròkhor and the Students" in 1886 or 1887, and the first chapters of it were printed in the well-known magazine "Russian Thought" in 1888. As soon however as the plot began to develop and the nature and tendency of the story became apparent, the censor interposed with his veto; and the publishers of the magazine were compelled to announce to its readers that "on account of circumstances beyond their control" the remainder of the novel could not be printed.

Mr. Korolenko's short stories, sketches,

and studies of character show so much talent, originality, and artistic skill that if he were untrammelled, and could work out his ideas and conceptions in his own way, there would be every reason to predict for him a useful and brilliant literary career. Unfortunately, however, all Russian authors are forced to work within the bounds set for them by an arbitrary and often stupid censorship; and the most promising career may be utterly ruined by the caprice of an ignorant official, or by a sentence of exile for life or for a long term of years to the sub-arctic province of Yakutsk. I can recall the names of a dozen young Russian authors, journalists, or poets, among them Korolenko, Màchtet, Lessèvitch, Volkhòfski, Petropàvlovski, Chudnòfski, Klemens, Ivanchìn-Pisaref, and Staniukòvitch, who are in Siberia now, or have spent there

some of the best years of their young manhood.

One can only wonder at and admire the courage, the energy, and the persistence of men like Korolenko, who, although gagged by the censor, imprisoned, and banished to the remotest parts of Siberia, work on with heroic patience, and finally make their names known and respected, not only in their native country but throughout the civilized world.

GEORGE KENNAN.



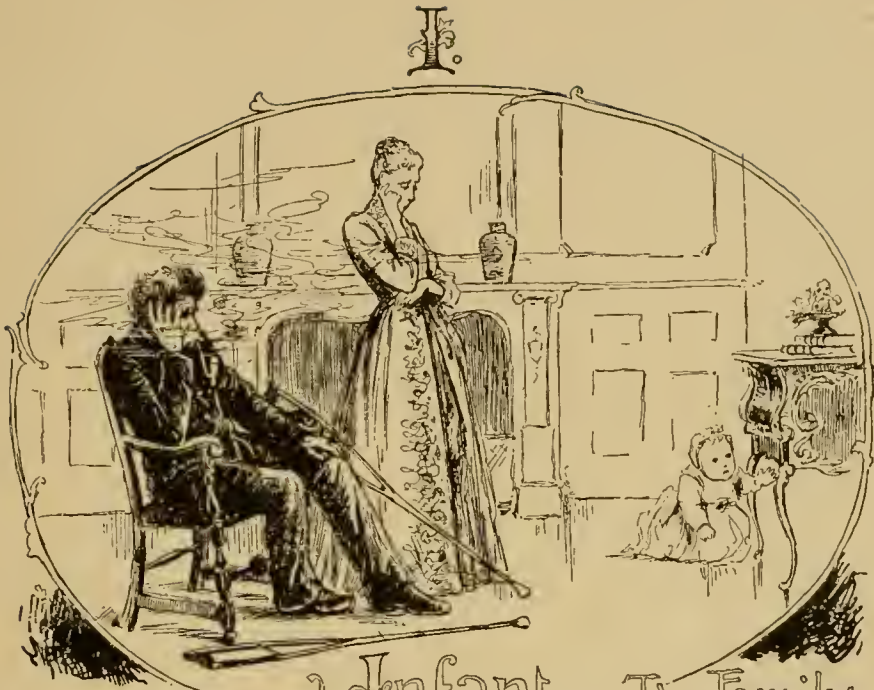
I.

THE BLIND INFANT.



THE FAMILY ❀





The Blind Infant. The Family.

At the hour of midnight, in a wealthy family living in the southwestern part of Russia, a child was born. As the first faint, pitiful cry of the baby echoed through the room, the young mother, who had been lying with closed eyes, unconscious to all appearances, stirred uneasily in the bed. She murmured a word or two in a low whispering tone, while her pallid face, with its sweet and almost

childlike features, was disfigured by an expression of impatience, — like that of a spoiled child, who resents the unwonted suffering as something new to her experience. The nurse bent low to catch the inarticulate sounds that fell from her whispering lips.

“Why, why does he —?” murmured the invalid in the same impatient whisper.

The nurse did not understand the question. Again the child cried out, and again the same shadow of sharp pain darkened the face of the mother, while large tears rolled down from her closed eyes.

“Why, why,” she repeated in a whisper.

At last the meaning of her question seemed to occur to the nurse, who answered quite calmly, —

“Oh, you mean why does the child cry? Babies always do. You must not agitate yourself.”

But the mother was not to be pacified. She started every time the little one cried, and

kept repeating in tones of angry impatience, "Why — why — so dreadfully?"

To the nurse there seemed nothing unusual in the cries of the infant; and supposing the mother to be either unconscious or simply delirious, she left her, and busied herself with the child.

The young mother said no more, but from time to time an anguish too deep for expression brought the tears to her eyes. They forced their way through the thick black eyelashes, and slowly rolled down her pale marble-like cheeks. Perchance her mother's heart was torn by a presentiment of some dark, abiding misery hanging like a heavy cloud over the infant's crib, and destined to accompany him through life even unto the grave. These signs of emotion, on the other hand, were very likely nothing more than the wanderings of delirium. But however this may have been, the child was indeed born blind.

II.

At first no one perceived it. The boy had that vague way of looking at objects common to all very young infants. As the days went by, the life of the new-born man could soon be reckoned by weeks. His eyes grew clearer; the thin film that had overspread them disappeared, and the pupil became defined. But the child was never seen to turn his head, to follow the bright sunbeams that found their way into the room; nor did the merry chirping of the birds, nor the rustling of the branches of the green beech-trees in the shaded garden beneath the windows, attract his notice.

The mother, who had now recovered, was the first one to mark with anxiety the strange immobility of the child's expression, so invariably calm and serious. With pitiful eyes, like a frightened dove, she would question those about her: "Tell me what makes him look so unnatural?"

“What do you mean?” strangers would reply in tones of indifference; “he looks like all other children of his age.”

“But watch him! See how oddly he fumbles with his hands!”

“The child cannot yet regulate the movements of his hands by the impressions which his eyes receive,” replied the doctor.

“Why does he look constantly in one direction? He is — blind!”

As the dread suspicion found utterance in words, not one of them could calm the mother’s agitation. The doctor took the child in his arms, and turning him suddenly toward the light, looked into his eyes. An expression of alarm passed over his countenance, and after a few vague remarks he took his leave, promising to return in two days. The mother moaned and fluttered like a wounded bird, pressing the child to her bosom, while the boy’s eyes kept ever the same steadfast and rigid stare.

The doctor did return in two days, bringing

with him an ophthalmoscope. After lighting a candle, he proceeded to test the eyes of the infant by flashing it suddenly before them and as suddenly withdrawing it ; finally, with an expression of distress, he said, —

“It grieves me deeply, Madam, but I am forced to admit that you have divined the truth. The boy indeed is blind, — irremediably blind.”

Sadly, but without agitation, the mother listened to this announcement. “I knew it long ago,” she softly murmured.

III.

The family into which this blind child was born was a small one. Its other two members were the father and “Uncle Maxim,” so called not only by his own people, but also by friends and acquaintances. The father was a fair example of the landowners in the southwestern district. He was good-natured, even kindly, probably an excellent overseer of the workmen,

fond of building and making alterations in his mills. These occupations consumed all his time ; hence his voice was seldom heard in the house except at the regular hours for dinner, lunch, or other events of a similar character. At such times he never failed to ask his customary question of his wife, "Are you feeling well, my dove?" After which he would seat himself at the table, and make no further remarks save perhaps an occasional observation on the subject of cylinders or pinions. It might be expected that his quiet and simple existence would find a pale reflection in the nature of his son.

Uncle Maxim was of quite a different temperament. Ten years previous to the events we are about to describe, he had been famed for his quarrelsome temper, not only in the vicinity of his own estate, but even in Kiev and at the Contracts.¹ No one could understand the existence of such a brother in a family so respectable

¹ A local name for the formerly famous fairs in Kiev.

as that of Pani ¹ Popèlska, née Yatzènko. Amicable relations with such a man were out of the question, for it was impossible to please him. He insolently repelled the advances of the Pans,² and overlooked an amount of wilfulness and impertinence on the part of the peasants, which would have been punished with blows by even the mildest among the nobility. Finally, to the great joy of all respectable persons, Uncle Maxim for reasons best known to himself became very much displeased with the Austrians, and departed for Italy. There he joined Garibaldi, a heathen soldier, who like himself delighted in fighting, — and who, as it was rumored among the Panlandlords, was in league with the devil, and showed no reverence for the Pope. By such actions Maxim of course imperilled forever his restless, heretical soul; but on the occasion of the Contracts fewer scandals took place, and

¹ “Lady,” “madam,” — a word used in Poland and in the southwest of Russia.—TR.

² “Gentlemen.” — TR.

many an excellent mother felt more at ease concerning the welfare of her sons.

The Austrians, on their part, were doubtless angry with Uncle Maxim. Now and then his name appeared in the "*Courier*," — a favorite old paper of the Pan-landlords, — united with those of Garibaldi's most daring comrades; and one day the Pans read in the same "*Courier*" that Uncle Maxim had fallen with his horse on the battle-field. The enraged Austrians, who had long been waiting for a chance to attack this desperate Volynian,¹ who in the opinion of his countrymen was Garibaldi's mainstay and support, chopped him in pieces like cabbage. "Maxim's was a sad end," said the Pans, and ascribed it to the immediate interposition of Saint Peter in behalf of his representative on earth. Maxim was reckoned among the dead. Subsequently, however, it became known that the Austrian sabres had no power to expel Maxim's obstinate spirit, and that it still dwelt in his con-

¹ Volynia, a province of Russia.

siderably damaged body. The Garibaldians, rescuing their worthy comrade from the fray, had carried him to some hospital, and, lo ! after a few years Maxim unexpectedly appeared in his sister's house, where he ever after remained.

But Maxim could fight no more duels. He had lost his right foot, and was obliged to use a crutch, while his left leg was so injured as to require him to use also a cane. On the whole he had lost much of his former excitability, and it was only occasionally that his sharp tongue did duty for his sword. He ceased to visit the Confraternities, seldom appeared in society, and spent most of his time in the library reading ; but in regard to the contents of the books, save for the *a priori* supposition that they must be atheistic, no one had the faintest idea. He also wrote from time to time ; but as his compositions never appeared in the "Courier," they were supposed to be quite insignificant.

About the time when the little new being entered upon its career in the country house, one

might have noticed streaks of silver gray in Uncle Maxim's closely cropped hair. From the constant use of crutch and cane he had grown high shouldered, which gave to his figure a certain square effect. His peculiar aspect, his knitted brows, the clatter of his crutch and cane, and the clouds of tobacco smoke in which he was constantly enveloped, since he never took the pipe from his mouth, — all these things intimidated strangers, and only those who lived with him knew that his crippled body held a warm and kind heart, and that his large square head covered with thick bristling hair was the seat of constant mental activity.

But those who were nearer to him had but a vague notion of the problems that perplexed and absorbed Uncle Maxim's mind at this time. They only knew that he would sit motionless for hours at a time, enveloped in a cloud of blue smoke, with knitted eye-brows and a far-away look in his eyes. Meanwhile this crippled warrior was pondering upon the battle of life,

and feeling that there was no room in it for invalids. He pictured himself as having left the ranks forever, and he felt like a man encumbering the hospital ambulance. He was like a knight, unseated and overthrown in the conflict of life. Did it not show a lack of courage to crawl in the dust like a crushed worm? Would it not be a coward's part to grasp the stirrup of the conqueror, and beg for the sorry remnant of his own life?

While Uncle Maxim was calmly considering this vital question with all its *pros* and *cons*, a new being appeared before his eyes, whose fate it was to enter life an invalid from his very birth. At first Maxim paid but little heed to the blind child, but as time went on, the singular likeness between the boy's fate and his own interested him. "Hm! Hm!" he thoughtfully muttered to himself as he looked at the child from the corner of his eyes, "this chap is also an invalid. If we two could be put together, one useful man might be made of us." And after that he gazed at the child more and more frequently.

IV.

The child was born blind. Who was to blame for this misfortune? No one. There was no slightest shade of the “evil eye;” the very cause of the misfortune itself was hidden somewhere in the depths of the mysterious and complex processes of life. Anguish pierced the mother’s heart as she gazed on her blind boy. She suffered not alone as a mother, in her sympathy with her son’s affliction, together with a sad prescience of the painful future awaiting her child; but added to these feelings there dwelt within the depths of the young mother’s heart a consciousness that the cause of this misfortune may have been latent, as a dreaded possibility, in those who gave him life. This in itself sufficed to make the little creature, with his beautiful sightless eyes, the central figure of the family and its unconscious despot. Every member of the household strove to gratify his lightest fancy.

What would in time have become of this boy,

unconsciously predisposed as he was to resent his misfortune, and whose egotism was fostered by all those who surrounded him, had not a strange fatality combined with the Austrian sabres to compel Uncle Maxim to settle down in the country in his sister's family, — no one can tell. By the presence of the blind boy in the house, the active mind of the crippled soldier was gradually and imperceptibly directed into a new channel. He would still smoke his pipe hour after hour, but the old expression of pain and dejection had given place to one of interest. Yet the more Uncle Maxim pondered, the more he wrinkled his thick brows, and more and more heavy grew the volumes of smoke. Finally one day he made up his mind to interfere.

“That youngster,” he said, puffing out ring after ring of smoke, “will be much more unhappy than I am. Far better had he never been born.”

An expression of acute suffering saddened the mother's face as she gave her brother a re-

proachful glance. "It is cruel to remind me of this, Max," she said gently, "and to do it wantonly!"

"I am simply telling you the truth," replied Maxim. "I have lost a hand and a foot, but I have eyes. This youngster has no eyes, and in time will have neither hands nor feet nor will."

"What do you mean?"

"Pray understand me, Anna," said Maxim in a gentler tone, "I would not reiterate these cruel truths had I no object. This boy's nervous organization is extremely sensitive; hence it is possible so to develop his other faculties that their acuteness will compensate him, at least to a certain degree, for his blindness. But to attain this he must use his faculties; and the use of one's faculties must be compelled by necessity. An unwise solicitude, that prevents him from making any effort, will ruin his chances for living a full life."

The mother was sensible, and therefore knew how to control that instinctive impulse which

urged her, at every pitiful cry of the child, to rush to him.

A few months after this conversation the boy could creep about the rooms with ease and rapidity; he listened intently to every sound, and by his sense of touch eagerly examined every object that happened to come within his reach. He soon learned to know his mother by her footstep, by the rustling of her dress, and by certain other signs perceptible to him alone; it made no difference to him whether there were many persons in the room or not, or if they changed their positions, — he never failed to turn with unerring accuracy toward the spot where she sat. When she lifted him in her arms he knew at once that he was sitting in his mother's lap. When others took him up, he would pass his little hands rapidly over the face of the person, thus recognizing almost at once the nurse, Uncle Maxim, or his father. But if it happened to be a stranger, then the movements of the tiny hands were more deliberate; the

boy passed them carefully and attentively over the unfamiliar face, his features betraying his intense interest. He seemed to be looking at the strange face with his finger-tips.

By nature the blind boy was a very lively and active child ; but as month succeeded month, blindness set its impress on the boy's temperament, which began to manifest its true character. He gradually lost his rapidity of motion. He would sit perfectly still for hours in some remote corner, with unchanging expression, as if listening. When at times the various sounds that usually distracted his attention ceased, and the room became quiet, the child would sit absorbed in thought, and upon his beautiful face, serious beyond his years, an expression of bewilderment and surprise would appear.

Uncle Maxim was right. The exquisite organization of the child manifested itself in an extraordinary susceptibility of the senses of hearing and touch, by means of which he verified to a certain extent the correctness of his im-

pressions. All who saw him were amazed at the wonderful delicacy of his touch. Occasionally it even seemed as if he were able to distinguish colors ; for when, as sometimes happened, bits of bright-colored cloth fell into his hands, his slender fingers would linger over them, while a look half of perplexity, half of interest, would flash across his face. As time went on, however, it grew more and more evident that his susceptibility was principally developed in the sense of hearing. He quickly learned to distinguish the different rooms in the house by sound ; he recognized the steps of the members of the household, the creaking of his invalid uncle's chair, the dry and measured whiz of the thread in his mother's hands, or the regular ticking of the clock. Sometimes, as he felt his way along the side of the room, he would hear a slight rustle inaudible to others, and put out his hand to catch a fly crawling on the wall. When the startled insect rose and flew away, an expression of painful surprise

would come over the face of the blind boy. He could not account for the mysterious disappearance of the fly. But the next moment, in spite of his perplexity, his face assumed an expression of intelligent interest; he turned his head in the direction taken by the fly, — his acute sense of hearing having caught in the air the scarcely perceptible sound of the insect's wings.

Of all the glittering, murmuring, bustling world without, the blind child could form no conception save by its sounds. That peculiar expression characteristic of an intense concentration of the sense of hearing had become habitual to his face: the lower jaw was a little depressed, the brows contracted, and the head inclined slightly forward on its slender neck. But the beautiful eyes, with their unchanging gaze, imparted to the face of the blind child a stern and at the same time a touching aspect.

V.

The second winter of the boy's life was drawing to a close. The snow outside had begun to thaw, and the streamlets to sing their spring songs. At the same time the boy's health changed for the better. He had been rather delicate during the winter, and had in consequence been kept in the house, and never permitted to breathe the outdoor air. The double windows were now removed, and spring with all the vigor of new life burst into the rooms. The cheerful sun shone in at the glittering windows; the leafless branches of the beech-trees swayed to and fro; the distant fields were black, save for the white patches of melting snow still lying here and there, and the spots where the young grass had begun to look green. On every side the stimulating influence of the spring imparted new vigor and life. One seemed to breathe more freely.

To the blind boy within the room spring

manifested its presence only by the swiftness of its sounds. He could hear the rushing of the floods running a race, as it were, leaping over the stones, and sinking deep into the moistened soil ; the faint resonance of the whispering birch-trees as their tossing branches beat against the windows, and the rapid dripping of the icicles that hung from the roof, which since the sun had set them free from the chill embrace of the night frost were hurrying away, their ringing footsteps followed by a thousand echoes. All these sounds made their way into the room like a storm of pebble-stones beating a hurried tattoo upon the ground. Above all these harmonies of Nature could be heard from time to time the calls of the storks echoing softly from the distant heights, and dying gradually away as if melting in air.

This new birth of Nature was reflected upon the boy's face in the form of distress and perplexity. He would knit his brows, listen for a while, then suddenly, as though alarmed by the

mysterious hurrying of the sounds, he would stretch forth his arms, seeking his mother, and rushing to her would nestle in her bosom.

“What can be the matter with him?” the mother cried, questioning herself and others.

Uncle Maxim carefully scanning the boy’s face, could in no way explain his strange alarm.

“I suppose he cannot understand,” suggested the mother, thus construing the expression of mute surprise and distressed inquiry upon her son’s face.

The child indeed was frightened and uneasy. At first he had seemed to catch eagerly at the unaccustomed sounds, but soon he showed his surprise that the noises already familiar to his ear were all at once hushed and gone.

VI.

Soon the chaotic sounds of spring-time died away. Encouraged by the burning rays of the sun, Nature fell into her ancient grooves, and

gradually settled down to work. The newly springing life did its utmost ; its rate of speed increased like a swiftly rushing steam-train. The tender grass was springing in the fields, and the odor of the birch-buds filled the air.

It was proposed to take the boy out into the meadows to the bank of the nearest river. The mother led him by the hand, Uncle Maxim, leaning on his crutch and cane, walked by her side, and thus the three started for the little hill near the river, where the sun and the wind had already dried the ground. It was thickly carpeted with green grass, and its summit commanded quite a broad view. The brilliant daylight dazzled the eyes of Maxim and the mother ; and when the sunbeams burned their faces, the spring breeze came with its invisible wings, dispelling the warmth by a refreshing coolness. There was a sense of enchantment, of intoxication, in the air.

The mother felt the child's tiny hand clinging fast to her own, but so transported was she

by the exhilarating influence of the spring-time that she was less keenly observant than usual of this sign of childish alarm. She breathed in long and full respirations, and walked along without once turning her head. Had she looked down at her boy, she would have discovered a strange expression on his face. He turned his wide-open eyes toward the sun with a sense of surprise. His lips were parted; inhaling the air, he gasped like a fish that has just been taken out of the water; an expression of mingled pain and delight was depicted on his bewildered face, which passing over it like a nerve-wave illumined the face for a moment, yielding directly however to the former expression of surprise, that might almost be called alarm. The eyes alone constantly preserved their steady, unchanging, and sightless gaze.

Having reached the hill, all three seated themselves. As the mother was lifting the boy to place him in a more comfortable position, he caught nervously at her dress like one who is on

the point of falling, almost as if he no longer felt the ground beneath his feet. Again the mother took no heed of his alarm, because both her own eyes and attention were absorbed in the charming spring landscape.

It was noonday. Slowly the sun sailed across the blue sky. From the elevation where they sat could be seen the wide-spreading river. Its ice had already floated down the current, save a few occasional fragments dotting the surface here and there, which were fast melting away. On the low meadows the water was still standing in broad lagoons, which reflected the blue dome of the heavens and the snowy clouds that slowly passed and vanished like the melting ice. A gentle breeze rippled the glistening surface of the river. Looking across to the opposite shore one could see the dark grain-fields, whose steaming vapor rising wave after wave veiled the thatched huts far away in the distance, and obscured the vague blue outline of the forest. It was as if the earth sent up its clouds of incense to the sky.

All this, however, was visible only to those who had eyes. The boy saw nothing of this picture ; he could not look upon that festival of Nature, nor on her marvellous temple ; his sensations were vague and broken ; his childish heart was troubled. When he had first started, with the sun's rays falling full upon his face, warming his delicate skin, he instinctively turned his sightless eyes in its direction, as if he realized the central force in the invisible picture before him. The transparent distance, the blue dome overhead, the wide horizon, had no existence so far as he was concerned. The sole effect produced on him was a sense of some material substance, warming his face with its soft caress. Then something both cool and light, although less tangible than the warmth of the sun, lifted from his face this sensation of tender caressing languor, and left behind a delicious coolness. Within the house the boy had become accustomed to move freely, conscious of the space surrounding him. Here he was encompassed

by pursuing waves, which now caressed and now excited and intoxicated him. The sun's warm touch was suddenly brushed away ; a gust of wind began to ring in his ears and to blow about his face and temples, — indeed all over his head, down to the very nape of his neck, whirling around him as though it were trying to bear him away, or to entice him somewhere into the invisible space, benumbing his consciousness, and lulling him into a languor of forgetfulness. Then the boy's hand would cling more closely to his mother's, and it seemed to him as though his heart must cease to beat. However, after he was seated he appeared to grow calmer. Already, notwithstanding the strange sensation that pervaded his whole being, he had begun to distinguish the separate sounds. The atmospheric waves were still dashing tumultuously about him ; and as the throbbings of his quickened pulse beat time to the music of these waves, it seemed to him that they were entering his very body. From time to time they brought to him the

lark's sharp trill, the soft whisper of the budding birch, or the gentle splash of the flowing river. The lark, whizzing by on its light wings, paused just overhead to describe its capricious circles ; the gnats buzzed ; and over all, sad and prolonged, rose the occasional cry of the ploughman, urging his horses over a half-ploughed strip of land.

The boy failed to grasp these sounds in their entirety ; he could neither unite them nor group them in any satisfactory sequence. One by one they seemed to project themselves into his dark little head, now soft and vague ; now loud, sharp, and deafening. At times they came crowding confusedly on each other, jumbled in meaningless discord. Faster and faster ran the waves ; now it seemed to the boy as if above all this tumult of sounds he could hear muffled echoes, like memories of the past, coming to him from another world. When the sounds grew fainter, a sense of dreamy languor came over him ; a convulsive twitching betrayed the successive waves

of feeling that swept across his face ; he closed his eyes, then opened them, and every feature seemed to ask a question, striving to grasp the situation. His childish sense of appreciation, as yet but feeble,—overwhelmed as it was with new impressions, although it still struggled against the tide, making an effort to hold its own, to combine them into something like unity, and thus to gain the victory over them,—showed signs of giving away. The task was too great for the brain of a blind child, destitute of the necessary images by means of which he might have achieved it.

All these sounds rose into the air, flying to and fro, and falling one by one, all too varied, too resonant. The waves that had taken possession of the boy rose with greater force from the darkness that encompassed him with its reverberating echoes, and were again resolved into the same darkness, only to be replaced by other waves and other sounds more and more hurried, soaring above him, filling his soul with anguish ;

again they seemed to lift him up, as if lulling him to repose with gentle rocking motion. Suddenly above this vague confusion arose the long-drawn note of a human call ; then all at once everything became still. With a faint moan the boy rolled over backward on the grass. The mother turned instantly, and she in her turn uttered a cry : he was lying on the grass in a deep swoon.

VII.

Uncle Maxim was very much disturbed by this occurrence. He had of late ordered a number of physiological, psychological, and educational works, and with his habitual energy had devoted himself to the study of all that science has revealed concerning the mysterious growth and development of a child's soul. The delight of these studies had so charmed him that all brooding fancies concerning his own uselessness in the battle of life, "the worm grovelling in the dust," and "the hospital ambu-

lance," had long since vanished from the invalid's square head, and in their stead appeared a deep and thoughtful absorption; rose-colored hopes even came from time to time to warm the veteran's heart. Uncle Maxim grew more and more convinced that Nature, although she had deprived the boy of his sight, had not in other respects dealt unjustly with him. He was a creature who responded with remarkable activity and completeness to the exterior impressions accessible to him. Uncle Maxim conceived it to be his duty to develop the latent capabilities of the boy, so that the injustice of his doom might be counterbalanced by the efforts of his own mind and influence, and that he might be enabled to send as a substitute into the battle of life another and a younger combatant, who without his influence would be lost to the service.

"Who knows," thought the old Garibaldian, "but there may be a fight in which neither lance nor sword are needed? Perchance he

with whom fate has dealt so hardly may sometime employ the weapons that he is capable of wielding in the defence of others, victims of fate like himself; and then my life will not have been spent in vain, old crippled soldier that I am ! ”

Even the free-thinkers during the forties and fifties of the present century were not free from superstitious ideas regarding the “mysterious designs of Nature.” Therefore it was not surprising that with the gradual development of the child, who showed unusual gifts, Uncle Maxim should have arrived at the firm conviction that his very blindness was only one of the manifestations of those mysterious designs. “One unfortunate for another,”—this was the motto which Uncle Maxim had already inscribed on his pupil’s standard.

VIII.

After that first excursion in the spring, the boy was delirious for several days. He either

lay quiet and motionless upon his bed, or kept up a constant muttering, as if he were listening to something. Meanwhile the peculiar expression of wonder never left his face.

“He really looks as if he were trying in vain to understand something,” said the young mother.

Maxim had grown thoughtful; he merely nodded. He had suspected that the boy's strange alarm, as well as his swoon, might be attributed to the numerous impressions which the boy's perceptive faculties had been unable to grasp; and he decided to allow these impressions to find their way into the mind of the convalescent child by degrees, disintegrated, so to speak, into their component parts. The windows of the invalid's room had been closed, but when he began to recover, they were occasionally opened. Some member of the family used to lead him about the rooms, and into the vestibule, the yard, and the garden. Every time his mother observed a look of alarm upon his

face, she would explain to him the nature of the sounds that perplexed him. "That is the shepherd's horn you hear beyond the wood," she explained; "and that sound which you hear above the twittering of the sparrows is the note of the red-wing. Listen to the stork gurgling on his wheel.¹ He has just arrived from distant lands, and is now building his nest on the old spot."

As the mother spoke thus, the boy turned toward her, his face beaming with gratitude, and seized her hand and nodded, as with a thoughtful and intelligent expression he continued to listen.

IX.

Now, when anything attracted his attention he always asked what it meant; and his mother, or more frequently Uncle Maxim, would explain

¹ In Little Russia, high posts with old wheels fastened to the top are put up for the storks, and upon these the bird weaves its nest.

to him the nature of the objects or of the creatures that caused these various sounds. His mother's explanations, more lively and graphic, impressed the boy with greater force ; but sometimes this impression would be too painful. Upon the features of the young woman, herself suffering, could be read the expression of her inmost feelings, and in her eyes a silent protest or a look of pain, as she strove to convey to the child an idea of form and color. With contracted brow and wrinkled forehead the boy concentrated his whole attention. Evidently his brain was at work struggling with difficult problems ; his unpractised imagination strove to shape from the descriptions given him a new image, — a feat which it was unable to perform. At such times Uncle Maxim always frowned with displeasure ; and when the tears appeared in the mother's eyes, and the child's face grew pale from the effect of his intense effort, Maxim would interfere, and taking his sister's place would tell his nephew stories, in the invention

of which he would try to use only such ideas as related to sound and space. Then the face of the blind boy would grow calmer.

“And is he big?” the child asked about the stork, who seemed to be beating in his nest a slow tattoo. Saying this he began to spread out his arms; for this was his custom whenever he asked such questions, and Uncle Maxim would always tell him when he had extended them far enough. But this time he had stretched out his little arms to their utmost limit, and Uncle Maxim said, —

“No, he is still larger. If he were brought into this room and put upon the floor, his head would reach above the back of the chair.”

“He *is* large,” said the boy thoughtfully; “and the red-wing is like this,” slightly parting his folded palms.

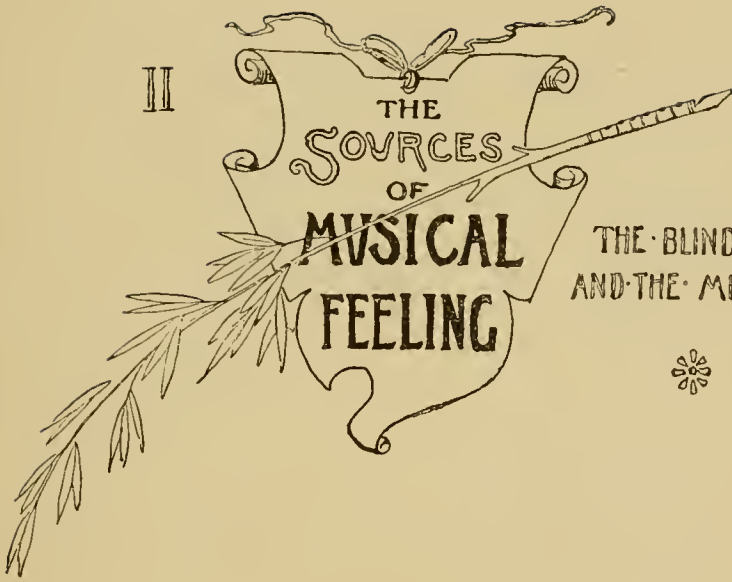
“Yes, the red-wing is like this. But the large birds never sing so well as little ones. The red-wing tries to make everybody pleased to hear him, but the stork is a serious bird; he stands

on one leg in his nest, and looks about like an angry master watching his workmen, and mutters aloud, heeding not that his voice is hoarse, and that he can be overheard by outsiders."

The boy laughed merrily while he listened to these descriptions, and for a time forgot his painful efforts to understand his mother's words. Yet her stories possessed a greater charm for him, and he preferred to question her rather than Uncle Maxim.



II



THE · BLIND · BOY ·
AND · THE · MELODY ·





The Sources of
MUSICAL .
FEELING The Blind Boy and the Melody.

THUS the dark mind of the child was gradually enriched by new images. By means of his abnormally keen sense of hearing he was enabled to penetrate deeper and deeper into the secrets of Nature. The dense, impenetrable gloom that veiled his brain like a heavy cloud still enfolded him, and although he had felt this from his birth, and one might suppose that he would have become accustomed to his misfortune, yet such was

the temperament of the child that he instinctively strove to free himself from this dark curtain. His perpetual though unconscious efforts to gain that light of which he knew not, had left upon his face the impress of his vague and painful struggle.

Yet the blind boy enjoyed moments of quiet satisfaction, even of childish delight, which came to him whenever he received a keen sensation from certain outward impressions, revealing unfamiliar manifestations of the unseen world. Nature in all her grandeur and power was not wholly inaccessible to him. Once, for instance, when he was led to a high cliff above the river, he listened with a peculiar expression to the far-away splashing of the water below, and when he heard the stones slipping from beneath his feet he seized his mother's dress and held his breath in fear. From that time depth was represented to him by the gentle murmuring of water at the foot of a cliff, or by the startling sound of stones falling.

A remote and indistinct song conveyed to the mind of the boy the idea of distance ; but when during a storm in the spring-time the pealing thunder rang out, filling all the air with its reverberations and angry mutterings, gradually dying away amid the clouds, he listened with awe, his heart swelling with emotion, and in his mind arose a grand conception of the magnitude of the firmament. Thus sound embodied for the child the immediate expression of the outside world ; all other impressions were merely supplementary to that of hearing, by whose aid his ideas took form as if poured into a mould.

Sometimes during the heat of noonday, when all around was quiet, when human life seemed at a standstill, and Nature had lapsed into that peculiar repose beneath which the noiseless current of life is felt rather than seen, the face of the blind boy likewise assumed an expression peculiar to himself. He seemed like one absorbed in listening to sounds inaudible to all the world beside, — sounds issuing

from the depths of his own soul, impelled to utterance by the universal calm. One who observed him at such moments might fancy that his vague thoughts had found an echo in his heart, like the uncertain melody of a song.

II.

The blind boy was already five years old. Slender and frail he was, it is true, but still he could walk and even run with ease and freedom around the house. No stranger on seeing him walk with such entire confidence from room to room, always turning at the right place and finding what he sought, would for one moment have suspected that the boy was blind; he would simply have been taken for a child intensely in earnest, ever with a far-away look in his eyes. But in the yard he moved with less confidence, feeling his way by the aid of his cane. If it so chanced that he had no cane in his hand, he chose rather to creep upon the ground, passing

his hands rapidly over every object that came in his way.

III.

It was a calm summer evening. Uncle Maxim was sitting in the garden. The father as usual was occupied in some distant field. Everything was quiet in the yard and around the house ; the hamlet was to all appearances going to sleep, and the hum of the servants' and workmen's voices had likewise ceased.

The boy had already been in bed for half an hour. He lay between sleeping and waking. For a certain length of time this peaceful hour had seemed to arouse strange memories within him. Of course he could see neither the dusky blue sky, nor the dark waving tree-tops, outlined sharp and clear against the starry heavens, nor the frowning peaks of the courtyard buildings, nor the blue haze overspreading the ground, mingling with the pale golden light of the moon and the stars. For several days he had fallen asleep

under the charm of a spell of which he could render no account the following day. When drowsiness had benumbed his senses, when he could no longer hear the rustle of the beech-trees, or the distant barking of the village dogs, or the voice of the nightingale beyond the river, or the melancholy tinkling of the bells attached to the colt browsing in the neighboring field, — when all these varied sounds grew faint and indistinct, it seemed to the blind boy that they were all merged in one harmonious melody, which made its way quietly into the room, and hovering over his bed brought in its train vague but enticing dreams. The next morning when he woke he still felt their influence, and asked his mother : “ What was that — yesterday? What was it? ”

The mother did not know what her child meant ; she thought he was probably excited by some dream. That night she put him to bed herself, and when she saw that he was on the point of falling asleep, she left him without

observing anything unusual. But on the following day the boy again spoke to her of something he had heard the previous evening which had made him feel so happy. "It was lovely, mamma, — so lovely ! What was it ? "

That night the mother decided to remain longer by her child's bedside, to discover if possible the solution to this strange riddle. She sat in a chair beside the crib, knitting mechanically, listening meanwhile to the even breathing of her Petrùsya.¹ She thought he was asleep, when suddenly his gentle voice was heard in the darkness :

"Mamma, are you there ? "

"Yes, yes, my boy ! "

"Please go away ; *it* must be afraid of you ; *it* has not come. I had almost dropped to sleep, and still *it* has not come."

The astonished mother heard the child's drowsy and plaintive whisper with a strange sensation. He spoke of his dreams in the most perfect good faith, as though they were reality.

¹ Diminutive of Peter. — TR:

Nevertheless the mother rose, bent down to kiss him, and then quietly left the room ; but she determined to creep cautiously round to the open window that looked out into the garden. Before she succeeded in carrying her plan into execution, the riddle was solved. Suddenly from the stable came the soft musical tones of a shepherd's pipe, blending with the gentle rustling sounds of the southern evening. She had no difficulty in divining the pleasing influence which these simple modulations of an artless melody, harmonizing with the witching hour of dreams, would naturally possess over the imagination of her boy. She herself paused, and stood for a moment listening to the tender strains of a song of Little Russia, and with a sense of relief entered the dusky garden in search of Uncle Maxim.

“Joachim plays well,” the mother thought. “It is strange that this fellow who seems so rough should possess such an amount of feeling.”

IV.

Joachim really did play well. He could even handle the more intricate violin, and there had been a time when on a Sunday at the inn no one had played the Cossack dance or the merry Polish Cracovienne better than himself. When seated on a cask with the violin braced against his shaven chin, and his tall sheepskin hat on the back of his head, he would draw the bow across the quivering strings, hardly a man in the inn could keep his seat. Even the old one-eyed Jew who accompanied Joachim on a bass-viol would wax enthusiastic, his awkward instrument with its heavy bass straining every nerve, as it were, to keep time with the light notes of Joachim's violin, which seemed to dance as well as sing; while old Yankel himself, with his skull-cap on his head, would lift his shoulders and turn his bald head, keeping time with his body to the gay capricious tune. It would hardly be worth while to describe the effect upon others

whose feet are so made that at the very first note of a dancing tune they involuntarily begin to shuffle and stamp.

Ever since Joachim had fallen in love with Màrya, a courtyard servant-maid of the neighboring Pan, he had neglected his merry violin. In truth it had not helped him to win the heart of the saucy Màrya, who preferred the smooth German face of her master's valet to the bearded visage of the musician. Since that time his violin had not been heard either in the inn or at the evening gatherings. He had hung it on a nail in the stable, nor did he seem aware that from dampness and neglect the strings of the instrument, once so dear to his heart, were constantly snapping with a sound so sharp, plaintive, and dismal that the very horses neighed in sympathy, and turned their heads to gaze in wonder at their indifferent master. In order to supply its place, Joachim had purchased from a travelling Carpathian mountaineer a wooden pipe. He probably expected to find it

a more suitable medium wherewith to express the sorrow of a rejected heart, and that its sympathetic modulations would harmonize with his hard lot. But the mountain pipe disappointed Joachim's expectations. He tried nearly a dozen of them in turn, in every possible way ; he cut them, soaked them in water, dried them in the sun, hung them up under the roof to dry in the wind, — but all to no avail. The mountain pipe did not commend itself to the Hohòl's¹ heart. It whistled where it should have sung, wailed when he wanted a sentimental tremolo, and never in fact responded to his mood.

At last Joachim grew disgusted with all the wandering mountaineers, having made up his mind that not one of them understood the art of producing a good pipe, and decided to manufacture one with his own hands. For several days he roamed with frowning brow through swamp and field ; went up to every willow bush,

¹ Nickname for Little Russian. — TR.

examined its branches, occasionally cut off one of them ; but he failed to find just what he needed. With sternly frowning brow he still pursued his search, and came at last to a spot above the slowly running river, where the placid waters barely stirred the lilies' snow-white heads. This nook was sheltered from the wind by a dense growth of spreading willows that hung their pensive heads over the dusky and peaceful depths below. Parting the bushes, Joachim made his way down to the river, where he paused for a moment ; and the idea suddenly came to him that this was the very spot where he was to find the object of his search. The wrinkles vanished from his brow. From his boot-leg he drew out a knife with a string attached to it, and after carefully examining a faintly whispering young willow, he unhesitatingly selected a straight and slender stalk that bent over the steep, crumbling shore. Tapping it with his finger for some purpose of his own, a look of self-satisfaction came upon his face, as

he watched it sway to and fro in the air, and listened to the gentle murmur of its leaves.

“That is the very thing,” he muttered, nodding with delight, as he threw into the river the twigs he had previously cut.

It proved to be a glorious pipe. Having dried the willow, Joachim burned out the pith with a red-hot wire ; and boring six round holes, he cut the seventh crosswise and tightly closed one end with a wooden plug, across which he cut a narrow slit. Then for a week he hung the pipe up by a slender string, that it might be warmed by the sun and dried by the wind ; after which he carefully cleaned it with his knife, scraped it with glass, and rubbed it hard with a piece of cloth. The upper part of the pipe was round ; on its smoothly polished surface he burned with a twisted bit of iron all sorts of curious designs. When he at last tested his instrument by playing upon it several tones of the scale, he nodded his head excitedly, emitted a grunt of satisfaction, and hastily hid

it in a safe place near his bed. He did not like to make the first musical trial amid the turmoil of the day ; but that very evening, trills delicately modulated, tender, pensive, and vibrating, might have been heard from the direction of the stable. Joachim was perfectly satisfied with his pipe. It seemed a part of himself ; its utterances came, as it were, from his own enthusiastic and sentimental bosom ; and every change of feeling, every shade of sorrow, was forthwith transmitted to his wonderful pipe, which in its turn repeated it in gentle echoes to the listening evening.

V.

Now, Joachim in love with his pipe was celebrating his honey-moon. In the daytime he conscientiously fulfilled his duties as a stable-boy, — watered the horses, harnessed them, and drove with the Pani or with Maxim. Sometimes, when he looked over toward the neighboring village where the cruel Marya lived, his heart

was conscious of a pang. But as evening drew on, all his woes were forgotten ; even the image of the dark-browed maiden lost distinctness, as it stood before him enveloped in mist, faintly outlined against a pale background, serving but to lend a certain pensive melancholy to his melodious pipe.

As he lay in the stable that evening, Joachim's musical ecstasy found vent in tremulous melodies. The musician had not only forgotten the cruel beauty, but had even lost all consciousness of his own existence, when suddenly he started and sprang up in bed, leaning on his elbow. Just when his notes were growing most pathetic, he felt a tiny hand pass swiftly and lightly over his face and hands, and then with equal swiftness over the pipe. At the same time he heard by his side the rapid panting of one whose breathing is quickened by agitation. " Begone, away with you ! " he uttered the usual exhortation, and immediately added the question : " Are you the good or the evil spirit ? "

that he might know if it were the Evil with whom he had to deal. But a moonbeam that had just crept into the stable showed him his mistake. Beside him stood the small Pan, wistfully stretching forth his little hands.

An hour later, the mother on going to take a look at her sleeping Petrùsya did not find him in bed. For a moment she was startled, but the maternal instinct directly told her where to look for the lost boy. Joachim, pausing for a moment, was quite abashed at the unexpected sight of the "gracious Pani" standing in the doorway of the stable. It appeared that she had been there for several moments before he ceased playing, watching her boy, who sat on the cot wrapped in Joachim's sheepskin coat, listening intently for the interrupted melody.

VI.

From that evening the boy came to Joachim in the stable every night. It never occurred to

him to ask Joachim to play for him during the daytime ; he seemed to fancy that the stir and bustle of the day precluded all possibility of these sweet melodies. But as soon as the shades of evening began to fall, Petrùsya was seized with a feverish impatience. The evening tea and supper served but as signs of the approach of the longed-for moment ; and the mother, although she felt an instinctive aversion for those musical séances, still could not forbid her darling to seek the company of the piper and spend two hours with him in the stable before bedtime. Those hours became for the boy the happiest of his life ; and the mother saw with painful jealousy that the impressions of the previous evening held entire possession of the child ; that during the day he no longer responded to her caresses with his former ardor ; that while sitting in her lap with his arms about her, his thoughts would revert to Joachim's song of the previous evening.

It suddenly occurred to the mother that while

she was in the *pension* of Pani Radètzka, several years ago, she had among other “delightful accomplishments” pursued the study of music. This reminiscence was not in itself a source of delight, because it was connected with the memory of her teacher, — one Klapps; a lean, prosy, and irritable old German Fräulein. This bilious maiden, who in order to impart to the fingers of her pupils the required flexibility, had trained them most skilfully, succeeded at the same time in destroying every vestige of poetical and musical feeling. The very presence of Pani Klapps, not to mention her pedantic method, was well calculated to abash so sensitive an emotion. Therefore after leaving school, and even since her marriage, Anna Michàilovna had felt no inclination to renew her musical studies. But now, as she listened to the piper, she was conscious that in addition to the emotion of jealousy a sense of appreciation and feeling for the living melody had sprung up in her soul, and the image of

the German Fräulein was almost forgotten. The result of this was that Pani Popèlska requested her husband to send to town for an upright piano.

“If you wish it, my dove,” replied the exemplary husband. “I thought you did not care much about music.”

That same day a letter was sent to town ; but several weeks must elapse before the instrument could arrive in the country.

Meanwhile the same harmonious strains proceeded from the stable evening after evening ; and the boy, who had ceased to ask his mother’s permission, hurried eagerly thither at the proper time. With the customary odor of the stable was mingled the fragrance of the hay and the pungent smell of the leather harnesses ; and whenever the piper paused for a moment one could hear the faint rustling of the wisps of hay which the horses, quietly munching, pulled through the bars, and also the whispering of the green beeches in the garden. In the midst of

all this Pètrik ¹ sat listening like one enchanted. He never interrupted the musician ; but once when the latter had been resting, and several minutes had passed in absolute silence, the charmed influence that possessed the boy gave way to a passionate yearning. He reached to grasp the pipe, took it in his trembling hands, and carried it to his lips. Gasping for breath, his first notes were faint and tremulous, but by slow degrees he gained a certain mastery over the simple instrument. Joachim placed the boy's fingers on the holes, and although the tiny hand could hardly grasp them, he had very soon mastered the notes of the scale. Every note possessed to him an individuality of its own ; he knew in which opening he should find each of these tones, whence to bring it forth ; and at times when Joachim was quietly and slowly playing some simple melody, the blind boy's fingers would imitate his movements. As tone followed tone,

¹ Diminutive of Peter. — TR.

he seemed to know exactly from which hole each one came.

VII.

At last, after three weeks had gone by, the piano was brought from town. Pétya¹ stood in the yard and listened attentively, in order to discover how the workmen hurrying to and fro would carry "the music" into the rooms. Surely it must be very heavy, for when they lifted it down from the cart there was a creaking noise, and also much groaning and puffing among the men. And now he could hear their heavy, measured tread; and at every step there was a jarring, a rumbling, and a ringing above their heads. When this strange music was placed on the drawing-room floor, it again sent forth a dull rumbling sound like the threatening tones of an angry voice.

All this alarmed the boy and by no means attracted him toward this new guest, at once

¹ Diminutive of Peter. — TR.

inanimate and wrathful. He went into the garden, and thus he missed hearing them set up the instrument ; neither did he know when the tuner, who had arrived from town, tuned it with his tuning-hammer, tried the key-board, and tightened the wires. It was not until all was in readiness that the mother ordered Pétya to be brought into the room.

With the best Vienna instrument as an auxiliary, Anna Michàilovna felt confident of victory over the simple rustic pipe. Now her Pétya is to forget the stable and the piper, and she will once more become the source of all his joys. She glanced merrily at her boy as he timidly entered the room, accompanied by Uncle Maxim and Joachim ; the latter, having asked leave to listen to the foreign music, with downcast eyes and overhanging forelock now stood bashfully in the doorway. Just as Uncle Maxim and Pétya seated themselves on the lounge Anna suddenly struck the keys of the piano. She played the piece that she had learned to

perfection at the *pension* of Pani Radètzka, under the instruction of Fräulein Klapps. It was not a particularly brilliant piece, but quite complicated, and one that required a certain amount of dexterous fingering; at the public examination Anna Michàilovna gained much praise, both for herself and her teacher, by the playing of this piece. No one positively knew, but many surmised, that the silent Pan Popèlski was first charmed with Pani Yatzènko during the identical quarter of an hour required for the performance of her difficult music. *Now* the young woman played it with the view of winning a second victory: she wished to bind still more closely to herself her son's young heart, enticed away from her by the pipe of the Hohòl.

But the fond mother's hope was doomed to disappointment; the Vienna instrument proved no match for the willow twig of Ukraine. True, the piano from Vienna was rich in resources, — expensive wood, fine strings, the skilled workmanship of a Vienna artisan, and all the wealth

of its wide musical range ; but the pipe of the Ukraine had allies of its own, — it was in its native haunts, surrounded by its own Ukraine nature. Before Joachim had cut it with his knife and burned out its heart with red-hot iron, it had swung to and fro above the river, so dear to the boy's heart ; it had been caressed by the sun of the Ukraine, and fanned by its breezes until the keen eye of the piper had caught sight of it overhanging the precipice. . The foreign visitor had but a slender chance against the simple native pipe, whose tones had first been heard by the boy at the peaceful hour of bedtime, through the mysterious rustling of the night and the murmuring of the green beech-trees, with all the well-known voices of Nature in the Ukraine that found an echo within his soul.

There could, moreover, be no fair comparison between Pani Popèlska and Joachim. Her fingers, it is true, were more dextrous and flexible ; the melody she played was richer and more

complex ; and Fräulein Klapps had labored diligently to make her pupil mistress of this difficult instrument. But Joachim had the true musical instinct. He had loved also, and sorrowed ; and animated by these emotions, he sought his themes in the surrounding Nature, and there he found his simple melodies, — the sighing of the forest, the gentle whisper of the grass upon the steppes, the sad, old, national melodies that he had heard sung over his crib when he was an infant.

The instrument from Vienna had truly but a slender chance against the magic of the Hohòl's pipe. Not more than a minute had passed before Uncle Maxim with sudden energy rapped on the floor with his crutch. When Anna Michàilovna turned toward him, she saw on Pètrik's pale face the same expression it had worn as he lay upon the grass on the memorable day of their first spring walk. Joachim in his turn looked sympathetically at the boy, then with one disdainful glance at the German music

he left the room, his heavy boots resounding across the drawing-room floor.

VIII.

Many a tear and no slight mortification did this failure cost the poor mother. She, “the gracious Pani Popèlska,” who had been applauded by a “select audience,” to find herself so utterly defeated, — and by whom? By a common stable-boy, Joachim, with his absurd pipe! As she remembered the disdainful glance of the Hohòl when her unsuccessful concert came to an end, an angry blush overspread her face, and she felt an actual hatred for the “detestable fellow.” But every evening when her boy hastened to the stable, she would open the window, rest her elbows on the sill, and listen intently. At first it was with a feeling of angry disdain that she sought to catch that “stupid squeaking;” but gradually, — she knew not how it came to pass, — the “stupid squeak-

ing” had taken possession of her soul, and she found herself eagerly devouring those mournful and pathetic strains. When she woke to a realizing sense of this, she began to wonder whence came their fascination, their enchanting mystery; and by degrees, the bluish dusk of evening, the vague shadows of the night, and the harmony existing between those melodies and Nature revealed the secret. No longer resisting the attraction, she confessed to herself, —

“Yes, I must admit that this humble music does possess a rare and genuine feeling, — a bewitching poetry not to be acquired by notes.”

This was indeed true. The secret of this poetry might be found in the intimate relation between Nature and those memories of the past of which it was ever whispering to the human heart. Joachim, the rude peasant, with his greasy boots and calloused hands, possessed that harmonious, that keen feeling for Nature.

Then the mother became aware that her haughty spirit had succumbed before the stable-

boy. She no longer remembered his coarse garments, redolent of tar ; but the pleasing modulations of the songs recalled to mind his kind face, the mild expression of his gray eyes, and the bashful, humorous smile that lurked under the long mustache. Yet again the angry color rose, overspreading the face and temples of the young woman : she was conscious that in this struggle for her child's admiration she had placed herself on a level with this "varlet," and that he, "the varlet," had conquered. The whispering trees in the garden high above her head, the light of the stars in the dark-blue sky, the violet mist that shrouded the earth, together with Joachim's melodies, all contributed to fill the mother's soul with gentle melancholy. Her spirit yielded itself in meek submission, and entered more and more deeply into the mystery of that pure, direct, and simple poetry of Nature.

Yes, the peasant Joachim had the true, living feeling ! And how was it with the mother herself ? Was she entirely devoid of that feeling ?

Why then did her heart beat so wildly, and why did the tears rise to her eyes? Did not her emotion spring from her devoted love for her unfortunate blind child, who left her for Joachim because she failed to give him as keen a pleasure as the latter? She remembered the expression of distress on the boy's face caused by her playing, and hot tears gushed from her eyes ; it was with difficulty that she controlled her suffocating sobs.

The poor mother ! It seemed as if an incurable malady had settled upon her, revealing its presence by an exaggerated tenderness at every manifestation of suffering on the part of the child, and a mysterious sympathy which by a thousand invisible chords bound her aching heart to his. For this reason, the strange rivalry between herself and the Hohòl piper, which in a woman of different nature would merely have stirred a feeling of annoyance, became for her a source of bitter, exaggerated suffering.

Thus time went on, without bringing the fond mother any apparent relief; and yet she was gradually gaining a certain advantage. She began to feel within her own breast an influx of melody and poetry, not unlike that which had attracted her in the playing of the Hohòl. Hope, too, sprang up in her heart. Under the influence of this sudden access of confidence she approached the piano several times, and opened it, intending to overpower the low-voiced pipe by harmonious chords. But every time a sense of irresolution and timidity restrained her. She remembered her boy's distressed face, and the disdainful glance of the Hohòl; and dark as it was, her cheeks flushed with shame, while with timid wistfulness she let her hands flutter over the keys.

Still, day by day an inner consciousness of her own power grew within the woman's heart; and choosing the time when her boy was playing in the evening in some remote garden-path, or perhaps out for a walk, she would seat herself

at the piano. At first her attempts were unsatisfactory ; her hands seemed powerless to evoke a response to her conception, and the tones of the instrument failed to interpret her emotions. But soon she perceived that the ease and freedom with which she could express her feelings through the medium of those tones were gradually increasing. The Hohòl's lessons had not been without avail ; while the mother's love, and an intuitive perception of the potent charm that swayed the heart of her boy helped her to profit by them. Her difficult and brilliant themes had given place to pensive songs ; the sad Ukraine "meditation" echoed in plaintive tones through the dimly lighted rooms, adding a tenderness to the mother's heart.

At last she gained confidence to enter into an open contest ; and one evening a strange combat went on between the manor and the stable. From the shaded barn with its overhanging thatch, gently quivering, came the trills of the pipe, while advancing to the encounter from the

open windows of the mansion, glittering in the moonlight through the leaves of the beech-trees, echoed the full ringing chords of the piano. At first neither the boy nor Joachim, prejudiced as they were, deigned to pay any attention to the "learned" music of the mansion. The boy even frowned when Joachim paused, and impatiently urged him on, saying,—

"Come, play! Go on playing!"

Three days had not gone by when these pauses grew more and more frequent. Joachim often laid his pipe aside to listen, and the boy, forgetting to urge his friend, listened also. Finally Joachim said in a dreamy sort of way, "That is fine! Listen! that is a fine thing!" And then in his dreamy, absent-minded way he took the boy in his arms and carried him through the garden to the open window of the drawing-room.

Joachim supposed that the "gracious Pani" was playing for her own amusement, and would take no notice of them. But Anna Michàilovna

had become aware that her rival, the pipe, had been silenced ; she realized her victory, and her heart beat with pride and joy. Moreover, her displeasure with Joachim had entirely vanished. She knew that she owed her present happiness to him, — he had shown her how to regain the devotion of her child ; and if her boy were now to receive from her new and valuable impressions, they would both owe a debt of gratitude to their teacher, the peasant piper.

IX.

The ice was broken. On the following day the boy with timid curiosity came into the drawing-room, where he had not been since the new city guest — that angry, loud-voiced creature — had taken possession of the room. But yesterday he heard the guest sing a song that pleased his ear, and gave him cause to change his opinion of the instrument. With the last lingering traces of his former timidity he drew near

the spot where the piano stood, and stopping at a short distance from it, he listened. There was no one in the drawing-room. His mother sat on a sofa in the adjoining room, sewing ; she held her breath as she watched him, admiring every movement, every change of expression on his sensitive face.

Putting out his hand, the blind boy touched the polished surface of the piano ; then overcome by bashfulness, he immediately withdrew it. Having twice repeated this experiment he drew nearer, and began a careful examination of the instrument, stooping to the floor to pass his hand over the legs, and feeling his way as far around its sides as he could go. At last his hand touched the smooth key-board : the soft reverberation of the string vibrated uncertainly on the air. The boy listened to this vibration long after it had ceased to be audible to his mother ; then with a look of intense interest he touched another key. Presently, as he drew his hand along the key-board, he happened to

touch a note of the upper register ; then he touched every note, one after the other, and paused to listen as they vibrated in trembling cadence and were lost in the air. The face of the blind boy wore an expression of mingled attention and delight ; he evidently enjoyed every separate tone, and by this sensitive observation of each elementary sound as component parts of melodies yet unborn, the future artist might be divined.

But it seemed as if each note possessed for the blind boy an attribute peculiar to itself. When beneath the pressure of his finger a brilliant note of the upper register rang out, a glow would come upon his face, uplifted as if to follow the ringing note in its upward flight ; but when he touched a deep bass-note, he stooped to listen,—seeming to feel sure that the heavy note must be rolling along the ground, scattering itself all over the floor, to be finally lost in the corners.

X.

Uncle Maxim simply tolerated all these musical experiments. Strange though it may seem, the inclinations which had so unmistakably manifested themselves in the boy excited mingled emotions in the breast of the old soldier. On the one hand, this intense passion for music indicated the boy's inherent musical talent, and foreshadowed a possible career; but in spite of this, a vague sense of disappointment filled Uncle Maxim's heart.

"It cannot be denied," thus ran Maxim's thoughts, "that music is a power by which a man may sway the hearts of the multitude. He, the blind man, will attract dandies and fashionable women by the hundreds, will play a valse or a nocturne," — here Uncle Maxim's musical vocabulary came suddenly to an end, — "and they will wipe away their tears with their delicate handkerchiefs. Ah, the deuce take it! that is not what I could have wished for him. But

what's to be done about it? The fellow is blind; he must do what he can with his life. But if it had only been singing! A song speaks not alone to the fastidious ear, — it excites fancies, arouses thoughts in the mind, and kindles courage in the heart."

"Look here, Joachim," Uncle Maxim said one evening, as he followed the blind boy into the stable, "do for once stop that whistling! It might do well enough for a street urchin, or for the shepherd boy in the field; but you are a grown-up peasant, although that silly Màrya has made a calf of you. Fie! I am really ashamed of you! The lass proved hard-hearted, and that has made you so soft that you whistle like a quail caught in a net."

As he listened in the darkness to this sharp tirade from the Pan, Joachim smiled at his unnecessary indignation. But he did feel somewhat wounded by his allusion to the street urchin and the shepherd boy, and replied, —

"Don't say that, Pan! Not a shepherd in

the Ukraine has a pipe like that, let alone the shepherd boy. Theirs are nothing but whistles ; but mine — just listen ! ” He closed all the openings with his fingers, and struck the two notes of the octave, drinking in as he did so the fullness of the tones.

Maxim spat. “ The Lord have mercy on us, the lad has lost his wits ! What do I care for your pipe ? They are all alike, both pipes and women, with your Màrya into the bargain ! You had better sing us a song, if you know how, — a good song of our fathers’ or grand-fathers.’ ”

Maxim Yatzènko, a Little Russian himself, was simple and unassuming in his manners toward peasants and servants. Although he often scolded and shouted at them, he never hurt any man’s feelings ; and while his inferiors were on familiar terms with him, they never failed to treat him with respect. Hence to the Pan’s request, Joachim replied, —

“ Why not ? I used to sing as well as the

next man. But, Pan, do you think our peasant songs are likely to please you?" he asked, slightly sarcastic.

"Eh, what nonsense, fellow!" replied Maxim. "A pipe cannot be compared with a good song, if only a man can sing well. Let us listen to Joachim's song, Petrùsya. But only you may not understand it, my boy."

"Is it to be a peasant's song?" inquired the boy. "I understand their language."

Maxim heaved a sigh. "Ah, my dear boy, these are not slave songs; they are the songs of a strong and free people. Your mother's ancestors sang them on the steppes of the Dnièper, the Danube, and the Black Sea. Well, you will understand them sooner or later, but just now I am anxious about something else."

In point of fact, what Maxim really feared was that the picturesque language of the folk-songs would not appeal to the vaguely obscure mind of the child; he felt that the animated music of epic song must be interpreted to the

heart by familiar images. He forgot that the old bards, the singers and bandur-players of the Ukraine, were for the most part blind men, who had been driven by misfortune or physical incapacity to the lyre, or bandur, to gain their daily bread. It is true that these men were but beggars and artisans with harsh voices, some of whom had not become blind until they were old men. Blindness wraps the outer world about with a dark veil, which likewise envelops the brain, entangling and impeding its processes; and yet by the aid of inherited conceptions and impressions gained from other sources, the brain creates in this darkness a world of its own, sad, gloomy, and sombre, but not devoid of a vague poetry peculiar to itself.

Maxim and the blind boy seated themselves on the hay, while Joachim reclined on his bench, — a position which seemed especially conducive to his artistic efforts, — and after musing for a moment he began to sing. Whether by chance or by instinct, his choice

was a happy one. He selected a historical picture, —

“Over yonder on the hill the reapers are reaping.”

No one who has heard this beautiful song well rendered can ever forget its strange melody, — high-pitched and plaintive, as though oppressed by the sadness of historical reminiscence. It contains no stirring incidents, no bloody battles or exploits; neither is it the farewell of a Cossack to his beloved, nor a daring invasion, nor a naval expedition on the blue sea or the Danube. It is but a fleeting picture that comes uppermost in the memory of a Little Russian, like a vague revery, like the fragment of a dream from an historic past. In the midst of his monotonous, every-day life that picture rises before his imagination, its outlines dim and indistinct, steeped in the strange melancholy that breathes from bygone days, — days that have left their impress on the memory of man. The lofty burial-mounds beneath which lie the bones

of the Cossacks, where fires are seen burning at midnight, where groans are sometimes heard, still remind us of the past. The popular legends as well as the folk-songs, now fast dying out, also tell us of the past.

“Over yonder on the hill the reapers are reaping,
And beneath the hill, the green hill,
Cossacks are passing,
Cossacks are passing !
They are reaping on the hill, while below the
troops are marching.”

Maxim Yatzènko was lost in admiration of the sad song. That charming melody, so well suited to the words, called up before his fancy a scene illumined by the melancholy rays of sunset. Along the peaceful slopes of the hill-sides he seemed to see the bowed and silent figures of the reapers, and below moving noiselessly, one after the other, the ranks of the army, blending with the shades of evening in the valley.

“Doroshenko¹ at the head,
Leading his army, his Zaporòg army
Gallantly.”

And the prolonged note of the epic song resounds, vibrates, and dies away upon the air, only to start forth anew, evoking fresh images from the dim twilight. These were the pictures which at the bidding of the song took form in Uncle Maxim's mind; and the blind boy, who had listened with a sad and clouded face, was also impressed by it after his own fashion.

When the singer sang of the hill where the reapers were reaping, Petrùsya was straightway transported in his imagination to the summit of the familiar cliff. He recognizes it by the faint plashing of the river against the stones below. He knows very well what reapers are, — he has heard the ringing sound of the sickles and the rustle of the falling ears. But when the song went on to describe the action under the

¹ A famous leader of Cossacks.

hill, the imagination of the blind listener at once transported him into the valley below. Though he no longer hears the sound of the sickles, the boy knows that the reapers are still up there on the hill, and he knows that the sound has died away, because they are so high above him, — as high as the pine-trees, whose rustling he hears when he stands on the cliff; and below, over the river, echoes the rapid monotonous tramp of the horses' hoofs. There are many of them, and an indistinct murmur rises through the darkness from under the hill. Those are the Cossacks "on the march."

Petrùsya also knows what "Cossacks" means. The Cossack Hvèydka,¹ who sometimes stops at the house, is called by everybody "the old Cossack." Many a time has he lifted Petrùsya to his lap and smoothed his hair with his trembling hand. When the boy according to his custom felt of his face, he found deep wrinkles under his sensitive fingers, a long, drooping

¹ A corruption of Fèydor : Theodore. — TR.

mustache and sunken cheeks, and on those cheeks the tears of old age. It was such Cossacks as he that the boy pictured to himself marching below the hill. They are on horseback, and like Hvèydka they wear long mustaches, and are old and wrinkled too. These vague forms advance slowly amid the darkness, and like Hvèydka are weeping for grief. It may be that the echo of Joachim's song suggests the lament of the unfortunate Cossack who exchanged his young wife for a camp-bed and the hardships of a campaign, as it rings over hill and valley.

One glance was enough for Maxim to discover that despite the boy's blindness the poetic images of the song appealed to his sensitive nature.



III





IN pursuance of the system which by Maxim's influence had been established, the blind boy had as far as possible been left to his own resources ; and from this system the best results had ensued. In the house he showed no signs of helplessness, but moved from place to place without faltering ; took care of his own room, and kept his belongings and his toys in order. Neither did Maxim by any means neglect physical ex-

ercises ; the boy had his regular gymnastics, and in his sixth year Maxim presented his nephew with a gentle little horse. At first the mother could not believe it possible that her blind child could ride on horseback, and she called her brother's scheme "perfect madness." But the old soldier exerted his utmost influence and in two or three months the boy was galloping merrily side by side with Joachim, who directed him only at turnings.

Thus blindness proved no drawback to systematic physical development, while its influence over the moral nature of the child was reduced to its minimum. He was tall for his age and well built ; his face was somewhat pale, his features fine and expressive. His dark hair enhanced the pallid hue of his complexion, while his eyes — large, dark, and almost motionless — gave him a peculiar aspect that at once attracted attention. A slight wrinkle between his eyebrows, a habit of inclining his head slightly forward, and the expression of sadness that

sometimes overcast his handsome face, — these were the outward tokens of his blindness. When surrounded by familiar objects he moved readily and without restraint ; but still it was evident that his instinctive vivacity was repressed, and it was only by certain fitful outbursts of nervous excitement that it was ever manifested.

II.

The impressions received through the channels of sound outweighed all others in their influence over the life of the blind boy ; his ideas shaped themselves according to sounds, his sense of hearing became the centre of his mental activity. The enchanting melodies of the songs he heard conveyed to him a true sense of the words, coloring them with sadness or joy according to the lights and shades of the melody. With still closer attention he listened to the voices of Nature ; and by uniting these confused impressions with the familiar melodies, he sometimes

produced a free improvisation, in which it was difficult to distinguish just where the national and familiar air ended and the work of the composer began. He himself was unable to distinguish these two elements in his songs, so inseparably were the two united within him. He quickly learned all his mother taught him on the piano, and yet he still loved Joachim's pipe. The tones of the piano were richer, deeper, and more brilliant ; but the instrument was stationary, whereas the pipe he could carry with him into the fields ; and its modulations were so indistinguishably blended with the gentle sighs of the steppe, that at times Petrùsya could not tell whether those vague fancies were wafted on the wind, or whether it was he himself who drew them from his pipe.

Petrùsya's enthusiasm for music became the centre of his mental growth ; it absorbed his mind, and lent variety to his quiet life. Maxim availed himself of it to make the boy acquainted with the history of his native land ; and like a

vast network of sounds, the procession filed before the imagination of the blind boy. Touched by the song, he learned to know the heroes of whom it sung, and to feel a concern for their fate and for the destiny of his country. This was the beginning of his interest in literature ; and when he was nine years old, Maxim began his first lessons. He had been studying the methods used in the instruction of the blind, and the boy showed great delight in the lessons. They introduced into his nature the new elements of precision and clearness, which served to counterbalance the undefined sensations excited by music.

Thus the boy's day was filled ; he could not complain of the lack of new impressions. He seemed to be living as full a life as any child could possibly live ; in fact he really seemed unconscious of his blindness. Nevertheless, a certain premature sadness was still perceptible in his character, which Maxim ascribed to the fact that he had never mingled

with other children, and endeavored to atone for this omission.

The village boys who were invited to the mansion were timid and constrained. Not only the unusual surroundings, but the blindness of the little Pan intimidated them. They would glance timidly at him, and then crowding together would whisper to one another. When the children were left alone, either in the garden or in the field, they grew bolder and began to play games ; but somehow it always ended in the blind boy being left out, listening sadly to the merry shouts of his playmates. Now and then Joachim would gather the children about him and repeat comical old proverbs and tell them fairy tales. The village children, perfectly familiar with the somewhat stupid Hohòl devil and the roguish witches, supplemented Joachim's tales from the stores of their own knowledge ; and the conversations ensuing were generally quite lively. The blind boy listened to them with great interest and attention, but

rarely laughed. He seemed incapable of comprehending the humor in the speeches and stories he heard ; and this was not surprising, since he could neither see the merry twinkle in the eyes of the speakers, nor the comical wrinkles, nor the twitching of the long mustaches.

III.

Not long before the period to which our story relates, the "possessor"¹ of the neighboring estate had been changed. The former neighbor, who had managed to engage in a lawsuit even with the taciturn Pan Popèlski, in consequence of some damage caused to the fields, had been replaced by the old man Yaskùlski and his wife. Although the united ages of this couple amounted to one hundred years, their

¹ The system of leasing estates is quite prevalent in the southeast of Russia. The lessee, known by the local term "possessor," governs the estate. He pays a certain sum to the owners, and the income derived therefrom depends upon his own enterprise.

marriage had been celebrated but recently, because Yakùb was for a long time unable to procure the sum required for hiring an estate, and thus was forced to act as overseer of one estate after another, while Pani Agnyèshka spent her period of waiting as a sort of companion in the family of the Countess N. When at last the happy moment arrived, and the bride and bridegroom stood hand in hand in the church, the hair of the handsome bridegroom was fairly gray, and the timid, blushing face of the bride was likewise framed in silvery locks.

This circumstance, however, by no means marred the married happiness of the somewhat late-wedded pair, and the fruit of their love was an only daughter about the age of the blind boy. Having won for themselves a domestic shelter, where under certain conditions they had a right to full control, this elderly couple began a peaceful and quiet existence, which seemed like a compensation for the hard years of toil and anxiety which they had passed in other folks'

houses. Their first lease was a failure, and they had started anew on a somewhat smaller scale. But in this new abode they had at once arranged things to suit themselves. In the corner occupied by the images, decorated with ivy, sacred palm, and a wax taper,¹ the old lady kept bags filled with herbs and roots, by whose aid she doctored her husband as well as the peasants who came to consult her. These herbs would fill the hut with a peculiarly characteristic fragrance, associated in the minds of the villagers with their memory of that neat and quiet little house, with the two old persons who dwelt therein, and whose placid existence offered so unusual a spectacle in times like these.

Meanwhile the only daughter of this elderly pair was growing up in their companionship,—a girl with long brown tresses and blue eyes, who straightway impressed every one that saw her with the uncommon maturity of her face.

¹ This wax taper is lighted during severe thunderstorms, and is also placed in the hands of dying people.

It seemed as if the calm love of the parents, finding fruition so late in life, had been reflected in their daughter's nature by a mature judgment, a quiet deliberation in all her movements, and a certain pensive expression in the depths of her blue eyes. She was never shy with strangers, willingly made the acquaintance of children and took part in their games, — which was done however with an air of condescension, as if she herself really felt no interest in the matter. She was in fact quite happy in her own society, walking, gathering flowers, talking to her doll, — and all so demurely that one felt as if in the presence of a grown-up woman rather than in that of a child.

IV.

One evening Petrùsya was sitting alone on the hillock above the river. The sun was setting, the air was still, and only the tranquil, far-away sound of the lowing herds returning to the

village reached his ear. The boy had but just ceased playing and had thrown himself on the grass, yielding to the half dreamy languor of a summer evening. He had been dozing for a minute, when he was roused by a light footstep. With a look of annoyance he rose on his elbow, and listened. At the foot of the hill the unfamiliar steps paused. He did not recognize them.

“Boy!” he heard a child’s voice exclaim, “do you know who it was that was playing here just now?”

The blind boy disliked to have his solitude disturbed. Therefore his answer to the question was given in no amiable tone, — “It was I.”

A slight exclamation of surprise greeted this statement; and directly the girl’s voice added with the utmost simplicity and in tones of approval, — “How well you play!”

The blind boy made no reply. “Why don’t you go away?” he asked presently, when he

perceived that his unwelcome visitor had not left the spot.

“Why do you drive me away?” asked the girl, and her clear tones expressed genuine surprise.

The tranquil sound of the child’s voice was grateful to the blind boy’s ear ; nevertheless he answered in his former tone, — “I don’t like to have people come here.”

The girl burst into a peal of laughter. “Really? What a strange idea ! Is this all your land, and have you the right to forbid other people to walk upon it?”

“Mamma has given orders that no one shall come here.”

“Your mamma?” asked the girl, thoughtfully ; “but my mamma allowed me to walk over the river.”

The boy, somewhat spoiled by the universal submission to his wishes, was not used to such persistency. An angry flush swept like a wave over his face, and half rising he exclaimed

rapidly and excitedly, — “Go away ! go away ! go away !”

It is impossible to tell how this scene would have ended, for just then Joachim’s voice sounded from the direction of the mansion, calling the boy to tea, and he ran quickly down the hill.

“Ah, what a hateful boy !” was the indignant exclamation he heard follow him.

The next day while he was sitting on the very same spot, yesterday’s adventure came to his mind. Now, this memory excited no vexation ; on the contrary, he wished that the girl with the quiet, tranquil voice, such as he had never heard before, would come back again. All the children that he knew shouted, laughed, fought, and cried noisily ; not one had such a pleasant voice. He felt sorry to have offended the stranger, who probably would never return.

The girl indeed did not return for three whole days. But on the fourth day Petrùsya heard her steps below on the river’s bank. She was walking slowly, humming something to herself

in a low voice, and apparently paying no attention to him.

“Wait a moment !” he called out, when he perceived that she was going past ; “is that you again?”

The girl at first made no reply, for her feelings had been hurt by her former reception ; but suddenly it seemed to occur to her that there was something strange in the boy’s question, and she paused. “Can’t you see that it is I?” she asked with much dignity, as she went on arranging a nosegay of wild flowers which she held in her hand.

This simple question sent a thrill of pain through the heart of the blind boy. He threw himself back on the grass and made no reply.

But the conversation had been started, and the girl still standing on the same spot and busying herself with her flowers, asked again : “Who taught you to play so well on the pipe?”

“Joachim taught me,” replied Petrùsya.

“You do play very well. Only why are you so cross?”

“I — am not cross with you,” replied the boy gently.

“Well, then, neither am I. Let us play together.”

“I don’t know how to play with you,” he replied, hanging his head.

“Don’t know how to play? Why not?”

“Because.”

“Tell me why.”

“Because,” he replied scarce audibly, and dropped his head still lower. Never before had he been obliged to speak of his blindness, and the innocent tone of the voice of the girl, who asked this question with such artless persistency, produced a painful impression upon him.

“How odd you are!” she said with compassionate condescension, seating herself beside him on the grass. “It must be because you are not acquainted with me. When you know me better, you will no longer be afraid of me. Now, *I* am not afraid of anybody.”

She said this with careless simplicity, as she played with her corn-flowers and violets. Meanwhile the blind boy had accepted her challenge to more intimate acquaintance, and as he knew but one way of learning to know a person's face, he naturally had recourse to his usual method. Grasping the girl's shoulder with one hand he began with the other to feel of her hair and her eye-lashes; he passed his fingers swiftly over her face, pausing occasionally to study the unfamiliar features with deep attention. All this was so unexpected, and done with such rapidity, that the girl in her utter amazement never opened her lips; she only looked at him with wide-open eyes in which could be seen a feeling akin to horror. Not until now had she noticed anything unusual in the face of her new acquaintance. The pale and delicately cut features of the boy were rigid with a look of constrained attention, which seemed in some way incongruous with his fixed gaze. His eyes looked straight ahead, without

any apparent relation to what he was doing, and in them shone a strange reflection from the setting sun. For a moment the girl felt as if it were some dreadful nightmare.

Releasing her shoulder from the boy's hand, she suddenly sprang to her feet and burst into a flood of tears. "What are you doing to me, you naughty boy?" she exclaimed angrily through her tears. "Why do you touch me? What have I done to you? Why?"

Confused as he was, he remained sitting on the same spot with drooping head, while a strange feeling of mingled anger and vexation filled his heart with burning pain. Now for the first time he felt the degradation of a cripple; for the first time he learned that his physical defect might inspire alarm as well as pity. Although he had no power to formulate the sense of heaviness that oppressed him, he suffered none the less because this feeling was dim and confused. A sense of burning pain and bitter resentment swelled the boy's throat ;

he threw himself down on the grass and wept. As the weeping increased, convulsive sobs shook his little frame, — the more violently, because his innate pride made him struggle to repress this outburst.

The girl, who had scarcely reached the foot of the hill, hearing those stifled sobs turned in amazement. When she saw that odd new acquaintance of hers lying face downward on the ground, crying so bitterly, she felt a sympathy for him, and climbing the hill again she stood over the weeping boy.

“What is it?” she said. “Why are you crying? Perhaps you think that I shall complain? Don’t cry! I shall not say a word to any one.”

These words of sympathy and the caressing voice excited a still more violent fit of sobbing. Then the girl sitting down beside the boy, devoted herself to the task of comforting him.

Passing her hand gently over his hair, with

an instinct purely feminine, and a gentle persistency, she raised his head and wiped the tears from his eyes, like a mother who tries to comfort her grieving child.

“There, there, I am no longer vexed,” she said in the soothing tone of a grown-up woman. “I see you are sorry to have frightened me.”

“I did not mean to frighten you,” he replied, drawing a long breath in his efforts to repress his nervous sobs.

“Well, it is all right now. I am no longer angry. You will never do it again,” she added, raising him from the ground and trying to make him sit down beside her.

Petrùsya yielded. Again he sat facing the sunset, and when the girl saw his face lighted by the crimson rays, she was impressed by its unusual expression. The tears were still standing in the boy’s eyes, which were as before immovable, while his features were twitching convulsively with childlike sobs, — all the signs

of a deep sorrow, such as a mature nature might feel, were evident.

“How queer you are — really !” she said with thoughtful sympathy.

“I am not queer,” replied the boy with a pitiful look. “No, I am not queer ! I am — blind !”

“Bli—nd ?” she repeated, prolonging the word in her surprise, while her voice trembled, as though that sad word, softly uttered by the boy, had given a heavy blow to her womanly little heart. “Blind ?” she repeated again ; her voice trembled still more, and then as though seeking a refuge from the uncontrollable sense of misery that had come over her, she suddenly threw her arms around the boy’s neck and hid her face on his breast.

This sad discovery taking her entirely by surprise, had instantly changed the self-composed little woman to a grieved and helpless child, who in her turn wept bitterly and inconsolably.

V.

Meanwhile the sun, revolving as it were in the glowing atmosphere, vanished below the dark line of the horizon. For a moment the golden rim of the fiery ball had lingered on the edge, leaving two or three burning sparks behind, and then the dark outlines of the distant forest became at once defined by an uninterrupted blue line. The wind blew fresh from the river.

The girl had ceased crying ; only now and then a sob would break forth in spite of her. Petrúsyá sat with bowed head as if hardly able to comprehend so lively an expression of sympathy.

“ I am — sorry,” she said at last, by way of explaining her weakness, but her voice was still broken by sobs. Then after a short silence, having partially regained her self-control, she made an attempt to change the conversation to some topic of which they could both speak with

composure. "The sun has set," she said thoughtfully.

"I don't know how it looks," was the mournful reply. "I only — feel it."

"You don't know the sun?"

"No."

"And you don't know your mamma, either?"

"Yes, I know mamma. I can tell her step from a distance."

"Yes, of course you can. I can tell my mother when my eyes are shut."

The conversation had assumed a less agitating tone.

"I can feel the sun," said the blind boy, growing more animated, "and I can tell when it has set."

"How can you tell?"

"Because — don't you see? — I can't tell why myself."

"Yes," said the girl, and she seemed quite satisfied with this reply, and both were silent.

"I can read," Petrùsya was the first to break

the silence, "and I shall soon begin to learn to write with a pen."

"How do you manage?" she inquired, and suddenly paused abashed, reluctant to pursue the delicate subject.

But he understood her. "I read from my own book, with my fingers," he explained.

"With your fingers? I could never learn to read with my fingers. I read poorly enough with my eyes. My father says that it is difficult for women to learn."

"And I can even read French."

"How clever you are!" she exclaimed admiringly. "But I am afraid that you will take cold," she added; "see how the fog is rising over the river."

"And you yourself?"

"I am not afraid. What harm can it do me?"

"Neither am I afraid. Could a man possibly take cold more easily than a woman? Uncle Maxim says a man must never fear any-

thing, neither cold nor hunger, nor the thunder-bolt, nor the hurricane."

"Maxim, — the one on crutches? I have seen him. He is terrible."

"No, indeed. He is very kind."

"No, he is terrible," she persisted. "You cannot know, because you never saw him."

"I do know him. He teaches me everything."

"Does he beat you?"

"Never. He never beats me or screams at me, — never."

"Well, I am glad of that. How could anybody strike a blind boy? It would be a sin."

"He never strikes any one," said Petrùsya, in an abstracted tone of voice, for his sensitive ear had caught the sound of Joachim's steps.

In fact the tall figure of the Hohòl appeared a moment later on the summit of the rising ground that separated the estate from the shore, and his voice resounded through the tranquil evening air, — "Panitch!"

"They are calling you," said the girl, rising.

"I know it; but I don't want to go."

"Oh, yes, do go. I will come to see you to-morrow. They are waiting for you now, and for me too."

The girl was faithful to her promise, and appeared even earlier than Petrùsya could have expected her. The next day as he was sitting in his room at his daily lesson with Maxim, he suddenly raised his head, listened, and exclaimed eagerly, "May I go for a minute? The girl has come."

"What girl do you mean?" inquired Maxim, as he followed the boy out of the door.

Petrùsya's acquaintance of yesterday had in fact entered the yard of the mansion at that very moment, and on seeing Anna Michàilovna who was in the act of crossing it, deliberately went up to her.

"What do you wish, dear child?" asked the former, supposing that she had been sent on some errand.

The little woman offered her hand, as she demurely inquired, "Are you the mother of the blind boy? Yes?"

"Yes, my dear," replied Pani Popèlska, admiring the girl's clear eyes and the ease of her manners.

"Well, Mamma gave me permission to come to see him. May I see him?"

At that moment Petrùsya himself ran up to her, and behind him in the vestibule appeared Maxim.

"That's yesterday's girl, Mamma, — the one I told you of," exclaimed the boy, as he greeted the child. "But I am taking my lesson now."

"Well, Uncle Maxim will excuse you this time," said Anna Michàilovna. "I will ask him."

Meanwhile the little woman, perfectly at home, approached Maxim, who was advancing toward her with his crutch and cane, and extending her hand, remarked with the most gracious condescension, "It is very good of

you not to strike a blind boy. He has told me of it."

"Indeed, my young lady!" exclaimed Maxim, with a comical affectation of gravity, clasping between his own broad palms the girl's tiny hand. "How grateful I ought to be to my pupil that he won your good-will in my behalf!" And Maxim laughed, as he patted the hand he retained in his own. Meanwhile the girl stood looking at him with her clear, open gaze, which completely subjugated his woman-hating heart.

"Well, Ànnùsya," said Maxim to his sister with a quizzical smile, "it seems that our Peter is beginning to choose his own friends. And you cannot deny, Annya, that he has made a good choice, even though he is blind. Has he not?"

"What do you mean, Max?" asked the young woman, gravely, as the color mounted to her cheeks.

"I was only joking," replied the brother,

briefly, perceiving that his sally had touched a sensitive chord, which responding revealed a hidden thought in the maternal heart.

Anna Michàilovna blushed still more deeply ; she stooped hastily, and with a sudden passionate tenderness embraced the girl, who received this unexpected and impulsive caress with her usual serene though slightly surprised expression.

VI.

From that day the closest intimacy was established between the Popèlski mansion and the home of the Possessor. The girl, whose name was Evelyn, came every day to the mansion, and in a short time she too became Uncle Maxim's pupil.

At first this plan of companionship in study did not meet with Pan Yaskùlski's approval. In the first place he thought that a woman needed no more education than would enable her to keep a memorandum of the soiled linen,

and an account of her own expenses; in the second place he was a good Catholic, and believed that Maxim had committed a sin in fighting the Austrians in defiance of the clearly expressed admonition of the "father-pope." Finally he firmly believed that there was a God in heaven, and that Voltaire and his followers were plunged in fiery pitch, — a fate which also, as many believed, was in waiting for Pan Maxim. However, as he grew to know him more intimately, he was obliged to admit that this heretic and fighter was a very good-natured and clever man, and so the Possessor compromised the matter.

"Let me tell you this, Vèlya," he said, addressing his daughter, as he was on the point of leaving her to take her first lesson from Maxim, "never forget that there is a God in heaven and a Holy Father in Rome. I, Valentine Yaskùlski, say this to you; and you must believe me, because I am your father. That for *primo*. *Secundo*, I am a Polish nobleman,

and on my coat-of-arms, together with the hayrick and the crow, is a cross on an azure field. The Yaskùlskis were ever good knights, and at the same time they were not ignorant concerning religious matters; and for that reason also you must believe me. But in regard to all subjects relating to *orbis terrarum* you are to respect what Pan Maxim Yatzènko tells you, and study faithfully."

"Do not fear, Pan Valentine," retorted Maxim, smiling, "we do not draft little Panis into Garibaldi's regiment."

VII.

Both children profited by this companionship in study. Although Petrùsya was farther advanced, there was still an opportunity for competition. Moreover, he could often help his new friend about her lessons, and she was very successful in devising methods of explanation in regard to subjects which were naturally difficult

for a blind boy to comprehend. Her society had introduced a new element into his studies, contributing a pleasing excitement to his mental labors.

Taking it all in all, fate had certainly proved propitious in this gift of friendship. The boy no longer sought solitude; he had found that congenial companionship which the love of older people had not afforded, and in moments when his little soul was most peaceful he was glad to have his friend near him. They always went together to the cliff or to the river-bank. When he played, she listened with genuine delight; and after he had laid his pipe aside, she would describe in her vivid childlike way the various objects in Nature that surrounded them. She could not of course picture them with absolute fidelity, but from her simple description the boy gained a very clear idea of the characteristic coloring of every phenomenon which she described. Thus, for instance, when she spoke of the darkness with which the black

and misty night shrouded the earth, he formed a conception of this same darkness from the low tones of her timid voice. Then again, as she raised her serious face and said to him, "Ah, what a cloud is coming toward us!—a very dark cloud!" he seemed directly to feel its cold blast, and in her voice he fancied the rustling sound of the creeping monster advancing threateningly upon him far above his head.



IV.



IV.



Blindness

Vague Questions

THERE are natures that seem predestined for the gentle task of love, as well as for the anxieties of sorrow,—natures in whom a sympathy for the cares or griefs of others is a necessity as imperative as the air they breathe. They have been endowed with that calmness so essential for the fulfilment of everyday duties ; all the natural longings for personal happiness seem to have been restrained and held in subserviency to the ruling characteristic

of their temperaments. Such beings often appear too placid, too reasonable, and devoid of sentiment. They are insensible to the passionate longings of a life of pleasure, and follow the stern path of duty with as much contentment as if it were yielding them the most glowing joys. They seem as frigid and majestic as the mountain-tops. Commonplace human life abases itself at their feet ; even gossip and calumny glide from their snowy white garments like spatters of mud from the wings of a swan.

Peter's little friend presented all the traits of this type, which as the product of education or experience is but rarely seen. Like genius, it falls to the lot of the chosen few, and generally manifests itself early in life. The mother of the blind boy realized what good fortune had befallen her son in winning the friendship of this child. Old Maxim likewise appreciated this, and felt confident that since his pupil now enjoyed the benefit of an influence heretofore wanting, his moral development would make

tranquil and continuous progress. But this proved a sad mistake.

II.

During the first few years of the child's life Maxim had believed the boy's mental growth to be under his entire control, and its processes, if not directly guided by his influence, at least so far affected by it that no new intellectual manifestation or acquisition could evade his vigilance. But when the boy reached that period of his life which forms the boundary between childhood and youth, Maxim realized how vain had been his audacious dreams of education. Nearly every week revealed something new, oftentimes something he had never anticipated; and in his efforts to discover the sources of the new idea, or representation thereof, Maxim was invariably baffled. A certain unknown influence, either organic growth or hereditary development, was evidently participating in Maxim's educational plans; and

he often paused reverently to contemplate the mysterious operations of Nature. In these outbreaks by which Nature effects her gratuitous revelations, disturbing, so to speak, the equilibrium between the supply of acquired knowledge on the one hand and that of personal experience on the other, Maxim had no trouble in following the connecting links of the phenomena of universal life, which diverging into thousands of channels enter into separate and "individual" lives.

This discovery was at first startling to Maxim, inasmuch as it revealed the fact that the mental growth of the child was subject to other influences beside his own. He became anxious for the fate of his ward, alarmed at the possibility of influences which could bring the blind man nothing but irremediable suffering. Then he tried to trace to their sources those mysterious springs which had leaped to the surface, hoping to obstruct their passage and check their influence over the blind child.

Nor had the mother failed to observe these things. One morning Pètrik ran up to her in an unusual state of excitement.

“Mamma, Mamma,” he exclaimed, “I saw a dream!”

“What did you see, my boy?” she asked; and in her voice there was a pathetic intonation as of doubt.

“I dreamed that I saw you and Uncle Maxim; and —”

“What else?”

“I don’t remember.”

“And do you remember me?”

“No,” replied the boy, thoughtfully, “I have forgotten everything.”

This was repeated several times; and each time the boy grew sadder and more restless.

III.

Once, as he was crossing the yard, Maxim heard from the drawing-room, where the music-

lessons usually took place, some very queer exercises. They consisted of two notes. First, the highest key of the upper register was struck incessantly, in swift repetition; then the low reverberation of a bass note jarred upon the ear. Curious to discover what might be the meaning of these strange musical exercises, Maxim hobbled across the yard, and a minute later entered the drawing-room. He paused, and stood motionless in the doorway, contemplating the scene before him.

The boy, who was now ten years old, sat on a low stool at his mother's feet. Beside him, craning his neck and turning his long beak from side to side, stood a tame stork which Joachim had presented to the "Panitch." The boy fed him every morning from his own hands, and the bird followed his new friend and master from morning till night. At this moment Petrùsya was holding him by one hand, and slowly stroking his neck and back with the other, while an expression of deep thought and

absorption rested on his face. The mother meanwhile, evidently excited and at the same time with a look of sadness, was striking with her finger the key that sent forth that sharp resonant note. At the same time, slightly bending forward from her seat, she watched the boy's face with a painful scrutiny. When his hand, gliding along the brilliant white plumage, reached the tips of the wings, where the white plumes were suddenly replaced by black ones, Anna Michàilovna instantly moved her hand to the other key, and the low bass note, with its deep reverberations, echoed through the room.

Both mother and son were so much engrossed in their occupation that they had not observed Maxim's entrance, until, recovering from his astonishment, he interrupted this performance: "Annùsya, what does this mean?"

Meeting Maxim's searching glance, the young woman was as much confused as if a severe tutor had detected her in the commission of

some fault. "You see," she said in confusion, "he tells me that he can distinguish a certain difference between the colors of the stork, but he cannot understand wherein this difference consists. Truly he was the first one to mention it, and I believe he is right."

"Well, what of it?"

"Well, I was trying, after a fashion, to explain this difference to him by sounds. Don't be vexed, Max, but I really think that there is a correspondence."

This unexpected idea took Maxim so entirely by surprise that at first he was at a loss for an answer. He asked her to repeat her experiments, and as he watched the rigid concentration of the boy's expression he shook his head. "Believe me, Anna," he said when he was alone with her, "it is better not to arouse thoughts in the boy's mind, to which you can give no satisfactory solution. He must resign himself to his blindness, — there is no help for it; and it is our duty to keep him from trying

to comprehend the light. For my part, I make every effort to avert each question, and if it were but possible to keep him removed from all objects likely to suggest them, he would no more realize that a sense is missing than we who possess five deplore the want of a sixth."

The sister yielded as usual to her brother's persuasive arguments ; but this time both were mistaken. While overrating the influence of outside impressions, Maxim forgot the powerful stimulus which Nature communicates to a child's soul.

IV.

They had before them a blind child, a future man, the possible father of a family. "Malevolent fate," or perhaps "accident" hidden within the mysterious realm of phenomena, had closed forever those eyes, — the windows through which the soul receives impressions from the glowing, many-colored, changing world. Doomed never to behold the light of

the sun, although not himself the offspring of the blind, he was still a link in the illimitable chain of bygone lives, and contained within himself the possibilities of future lives. All those living links now lost in the remote past, corresponding in proportion to their capacity to the impressions of light, had transmitted to him the inner faculty, and through him, blind though he was, to an endless succession of future generations who would possess the power of vision.¹

Thus it was that in the depths of this child's soul these hereditary forces lay dormant, — vague “possibilities,” hitherto unaffected by outside influences. The whole fabric of his mind, fashioned after the ancestral model, had reserved within itself a substratum of the impressions of light, the product of the countless experiences of his ancestors. Thus in his inner organization the blind man is like another possessing eyesight, but with eyes forever closed,

¹ Blind people seldom have blind children.

Hence a dim yet ever present consciousness of desire that craves contentment ; an undefined yearning to exercise the dormant powers of his soul which have never been called into action. Hence also certain vague forebodings and endeavors, — like the longing for flight, which children feel, and the joys of which they taste in witching dreams.

Now, at last, the instinctive inclination of little Peter's childish fancies was reflected on his features in that look of troubled perplexity. Those hereditary, and yet as far as he himself was concerned undeveloped and therefore unshaped, "possibilities " of the ideas of light rose like obscure phantoms in the child's mind, exciting him to aimless and distressing efforts. All his nature, in an unconscious protest against the individual "accident," rose to claim the restoration of the universal law.

V.

Consequently, however much Maxim might try to exclude all outward impressions from his nephew, he had no control over the urgent cravings that came from within. With all his precautions he could but avert a premature awakening of these unsatisfied yearnings, and thereby diminish the boy's chances of suffering. In every other respect the child's unhappy fate, with all its cruel consequences, must take its course.

And like a dark shadow this fate advanced to meet him. From year to year the boy's natural vivacity subsided, like a receding wave, while the melancholy that was echoing within his soul grew persistently, and left its impress on his temperament. His laughter, which in childhood resounded at every new and especially vivid impression, was now rarely heard. He was naturally less accessible to all that was bright and cheerful, and more or less humorous,

than to that vague obscurity and gloom peculiar to the Southern nature, which finds reflection in the folk-songs. These made a deep impression on the boy's imagination. The tears stood in his eyes whenever he heard how "the grave whispers to the wind in the field," and he loved to wander through the fields himself, listening to this murmur. He longed more and more for solitude; and when in his hours of recreation he started off on his lonely walk, the family would avoid that direction, lest they might disturb his solitude.

Seated upon some mound out on the steppe, or on the hillock above the river, or on the familiar cliff, Petrùsya would listen to the rustling leaves, the whispering grass, the vague souging of the wind across the steppe. All this harmonized perfectly with the deep seriousness of his mood. There, so far as in him lay, he was in absolute sympathy with Nature; he understood her; she disturbed him by no perplexing and unanswerable questions. There the

wind fanned his very soul, and the grass seemed to whisper soft words of pity; and as the spirit of the youth in harmony with the gentle influences that surrounded him melted at the tender caress of Nature, he felt his bosom swell with an emotion that communicated itself to his whole being. In moments like these he would throw himself on the cool, moist grass and weep; but in these tears there was no bitterness. Again, he would seize his pipe, and enraptured by his own emotions would improvise pensive melodies suited to his mood and to the peaceful harmony of the steppe. One could easily understand that any human sound coming unexpectedly to interrupt this mood would affect him like a distressing discord. At such times the only fellowship possible to him was with a soul akin to his own; and in the fair-haired girl from the estate of the Possessor the boy enjoyed just such a companion.

This friendship was the more firmly knitted

by mutual sympathy. If Evelyn contributed to their partnership her calmness, her gentle animation, or imparted to the blind boy some new detail of the surrounding life, he in turn gave her his sorrow. The little woman's knowledge of him seemed to have dealt a serious blow to her tender heart : pluck a dagger from a wound, and the bleeding will increase. On the day when she first learned to know the blind boy on the hillock in the steppe, her sympathy for his affliction had really caused her acute pain, and his presence had grown by degrees quite indispensable to her. Separation seemed to renew and increase the poignant pain of her wound, and she longed to be with her little friend that she might appease her own suffering by ministering constantly to his comfort.

VI.

One warm autumn night both families were sitting on the terrace in front of the house,

admiring the starry sky, with its blue distances and glimmering lights. The blind boy with his friend sat as usual by his mother's side. All was still around the mansion, and for the moment they sat silent ; only the leaves stirred from time to time, like startled things, with unintelligible murmurings, and then lapsed into silence.

Suddenly a meteor, leaping forth from the darkness, flashed across the sky in one brilliant streak ; and as it gradually disappeared, it left behind a trail of phosphorescent light. Petrùsya seated beside his mother had linked his arm in hers, and she became suddenly conscious that he started and began to tremble.

“What — was that?” he asked, with a look of trouble on his face.

“It was a falling star, my child.”

“Ah yes, a star,” he said thoughtfully. “I felt sure that it was a star.”

“How could you know, my boy?” inquired the mother, with a pitiful accent of doubt in her voice.

“He is telling the truth,” exclaimed Evelyn ;
“he knows many things like that.”

This increasing sensitiveness indicated that the boy was evidently drawing near the critical period that lay between childhood and youth. Meanwhile his development pursued its quiet course. He seemed to have grown accustomed to his lot, and the exceptional and uniform character of his sadness, — a sadness cheered as it were by no single ray of light, but at the same time free from all eager cravings, and grown to be the habitual background of his life, — was in some measure mitigated.

But this proved to have been simply a period of temporary repose. Nature has appointed these resting-places that the young organism may gain strength to meet other attacks. During these calms, new questions imperceptibly rise to the surface and mature ; and it needs but a touch to disturb this outward peace, and stir the soul to its very depths, even as the sea is lashed by a sudden squall.

V.



LOVE.



LOVE



AND thus a few more years went by. There were no changes in the peaceful mansion. The beech-trees in the garden rustled as of old, only their foliage seemed to have grown darker and thicker; the white walls, although they had warped and settled more or less, shone precisely as they used; the thatched roofs frowned the same as ever; and even the well-known sound of Joachim's pipe might be heard at the usual hour from the

direction of the stable. But Joachim himself, still a bachelor, and grown gray in the service as groom, chose rather to listen to the Panitch when he played either the piano or the pipe, it mattered not which. Maxim too, had grown still more gray. The Popèlski had no other children, and therefore their first-born, the blind boy, remained as ever the central object of interest, around which clustered the life of the whole mansion. It was for his sake that the family had thus isolated itself within its own narrow circle, contented with its tranquil existence, whose current had now united with the equally placid life of the Possessor's "cabin."

Thus Peter, who had now become a youth, had grown up like a hot-house plant, guarded from the rude winds of the outer world. He was still as of old in the centre of a vast, dark world. Darkness enveloped him in every direction, — above, around, on all sides ; illimitable, eternal. His delicate and sensitive organism vibrated in response to every impression, like a

finely strung instrument. This sensitive expectancy was perceptible in the blind youth's disposition; he seemed to feel that the darkness was about to stretch forth its invisible arms and arouse by its touch that which now lay dormant in his breast, waiting only for the summons. But the dreary darkness around him, familiar from his childhood, replied only by the caressing murmur that rose from the old garden, inspiring him with vague, tranquillizing, and dreamy thoughts. The turbulent current of the far-off world, known to the blind boy only through the medium of song and story, had no entrance here. Amid the dreary whispers of the garden and the peaceful everyday life of the country house, he heard of the tumults and tribulations of the world from the lips of others; and his imagination pictured it all veiled in clouds of mystery, — like a song, an heroic poem, or a fairy tale.

Everything seemed favorable. The mother felt that the soul of her son, protected as by a

wall was living in an enchanted dream, which was tranquil even if it were unreal. Evelyn, who had imperceptibly grown to womanhood, watched this enchanted tranquillity with her calm gaze, sometimes showing a slight surprise, or an expression of wonder as to future events, but never a shadow of impatience. Popèlski the father had brought his estate into a prosperous condition, but the good man troubled himself very little about his son's future life. A man of Maxim's temperament could only be ill at ease in this quiet life ; he simply endured it, looking upon it as a temporary arrangement, which had interwoven itself into his plans in spite of himself. He deemed it necessary for the youth's interior nature to gain strength and maturity, that he might be better able to cope with the rude assaults of life.

Meanwhile, outside the limit of this enchanted circle, life went on, seething, bubbling, and raging ; and at last the time came when the old veteran decided to break into this cir-

cle,—to open the door of the hot-house, and admit a current of outside air.

II.

By way of breaking the ice, he invited an old friend, who lived about seventy versts from the Popèlski estate, to pay him a visit. In former times Maxim used to be the visitor; but he knew that some young people were staying at Stavruchènko's house at that time, and so he wrote him a letter inviting the whole party. This invitation was accepted with pleasure. The two old men were bound by ties of friendship, and the young people were all familiar with the once famous name of Maxim Yatzènko, connected as it was with many a romantic tale. One of the sons of Stavruchènko was a student in the University of Kiev, in the School of Philology, very popular at that time. Another son was studying music in the St. Petersburg conservatory. Another member of the party was a

young cadet, the son of a neighboring landlord. Stavruchènko was a vigorous old man, gray-haired, wearing a long mustache after the Cossack fashion, and the loose Cossack trousers tucked into the boots. His tobacco-pouch and pipe were suspended from his belt, and he spoke nothing but Little Russian ; and beside his two sons, dressed in white sleeveless coats and embroidered Little Russian shirts, he vividly recalled Gògol's Taras Bulbà with his followers. But Stavruchènko lacked the romantic characteristics of Gògol's hero. He was on the contrary an excellent and practical landlord, who had always got on well with the serfs ; and now that serfdom was abolished he was clever enough to adapt himself to the new conditions. He knew the people after the landlord fashion ; that is, he knew every peasant in his village, and every peasant's cow, and almost every extra coin in each peasant's purse.

But if Stavruchènko did not have hand-to-hand encounters with his sons, like Bulbà,

they were forever at odds, regardless of time or place. Everywhere, whether at home or abroad, endless disputes arose between the old man and the young people ; it usually began on the part of the old man, who was always jeering at the "ideal Panitchis." The Panitchis would grow excited, the old man likewise ; whereupon an indescribable uproar would ensue, during which both sides would give and take some pretty severe thrusts. It was a reproduction of the differences between "Fathers" and "Sons ;" only in the southwest, where a certain courtesy of manner prevails, such scenes in the family circle are more gracefully managed.

The young people who had been away at school from early childhood, had only seen the country during their vacation, and therefore had not the practical knowledge possessed by the father-landlords. When that tidal wave known as the "love of the people" came rushing in upon society, it found the young men in the higher classes of the Gymnasium. They

turned their attention to the study of the lower classes, seeking their information at first in books. They soon proceeded, however, to the immediate study of the manifestations of the "national spirit" in its causes. In the southwestern districts the young Panitchis, in their white *svitkas*¹ and embroidered shirts, devoted themselves to the fashionable amusement of "visiting the people." They paid but slight attention to their economical condition, but made notes of the words and music of the *dùmkas*² and songs, studied the traditions, compared historical events with the traces they had left upon the popular mind, and looked upon the peasant in general through the poetical prism of an intellectually popular idealism. Thus the constant clashing of opinions diametrically opposed to one another entered into the disputes between the old man and the young people, and they were always at variance. And yet the

¹ Sleeveless coats. — TR.

² A meditation in the form of a song. — TR.

old man himself listened with delight to the eloquent tirades of the young fellows.

“Just hear him,” Stavruchènko would say to Maxim, with a sly nudge of his elbow, while the student with flushed face and sparkling eyes was delivering his oration. “Hear him, he talks like a book ! One might really imagine him a clever man. You had better tell us, you wise-head, how my Nechipòr deceived you.” The old man’s mustaches twitched, and he laughed heartily as he related with a purely Hohòl humor the tale of their discomfiture.

The young men blushed, but they paid him back in his own coin, saying : “If they were not familiar with the Nechipòrs and Hvèydkas in certain villages, they had studied the class as a whole ; and from that point of view they deduced their generalizations. For the áged and experienced, whose habits of thought are fettered by routine, the forest is hidden by the trees that stand nearest, but young men can embrace the most remote perspective at a glance.”

The old man was not displeased to hear the learned discourses of his sons. "They did not go to school for nothing," he often remarked, "but I can tell you that my Hvèydka will lead you like calves by a rope. That's the way it is! But he cannot deceive me, for I can stuff him into my tobacco-pouch and put him in my pocket. You are nothing but youngsters and fools!"

III.

A discussion of this sort had but just ended. The older people returned to the house, and through the open windows one could from time to time hear snatches of Stavruchènko's funny stories, together with the merry laughter of his audience.

The young people remained in the garden. The student spreading his *svìtka* on the ground, with his sheepskin hat pushed on one side, had stretched himself out on the grass with affected carelessness. His older brother sat beside Evelyn on a bench near the wall. The cadet,

in his carefully buttoned uniform, was seated next to them ; while at a short distance, with drooping head, sat the blind youth leaning back against the window-sill. He was turning over in his mind the discussions he had just heard, which had stirred him deeply, even to agitation.

“What did you think of all that was said just now, Pani Evelyn?” said the student turning to her ; “you have not spoken a single word.”

“What you told your father is all very fine ; but — ”

“Well — but what ? ”

The young girl did not reply at once. She let her work fall upon her lap, smoothed it out, and slightly bending forward began to examine it as if it absorbed her entire attention. It would have been difficult to say whether she was considering the advisability of using coarser canvas for her embroidery, or whether she was meditating over her reply.

Meanwhile the young men waited impatiently. The student, his face kindling with interest, rose on his elbow and turned toward the young girl. Her neighbor sat gazing at her with his calm and questioning eyes. The blind young man abandoned his easy attitude, sat up erect, and turned his face away from the others.

“But,” she said softly, still smoothing out her embroidery, “every man must choose his own career, gentlemen.”

“Lord bless us; what wisdom!” rudely exclaimed the student. “Really, how old are you, Pani?”

“Seventeen,” replied Evelyn, simply, — straightway adding, with an air of mingled triumph and curiosity, “I suppose you thought that I was a great deal older, did n’t you?”

The young men laughed.

“Had I been asked for an opinion concerning your age,” said her neighbor, “I should have been quite at a loss to decide between thirteen and twenty-three. At times you seem

a mere child, and the next moment I hear you reasoning with the wisdom of an aged dame."

"You must treat serious matters seriously, Gavriło Petròvitch," said the young girl in tones of admonition, and once more returned to her work.

For a moment all were still. Evelyn resumed her needle-work with her former deliberation, while the young men looked with curiosity at the miniature form of this wise young person. Although she had grown and developed considerably since the time of her first meeting with Peter, the student's comments upon her age were quite just. At the first glance this tiny, slender maiden seemed but a girl, although her tranquil, self-possessed movements revealed the dignity of a woman. Her face produced the same impression. That type of face seems peculiar to the Slav women. Handsome, regular features, outlined in calm severity; blue eyes, with a direct and tranquil gaze; pale cheeks, rarely tinged with color, — not however the pallor that is ever ready to flush with the

burning flame of passion, but rather akin to the cold purity of the snow. Evelyn's fair hair, glossy and abundant, showing darker reflections about her marble-like temples, was drawn back and gathered into one massive braid, which seemed to weigh her head back as she walked.

The blind youth, too, had grown taller and more mature. Any one seeing him at that moment, as he sat apart from the group just described, pale, agitated, and handsome, would have been instantly attracted by that peculiar face, upon whose surface every emotion of the soul was so plainly reflected. His black hair waved over a high forehead faintly lined by premature wrinkles; his cheeks alternately flushed and grew pale; the lower lip, slightly drooping at the corners, twitched nervously from time to time, and the large handsome eyes with their unwavering gaze added to this eminently South Russian type of face a somewhat unusual and sombre character.

“So Pani Evelyn supposes,” said the student

in a sarcastic tone, after a short pause, "that the matters we have been discussing here are inaccessible to the feminine mind; that her sphere is to be limited by the nursery and the kitchen."

The young girl replied with her usual seriousness: "No, you are mistaken. I understood all that was said, — therefore it is accessible to a woman's mind. I spoke only for myself, individually."

She became silent again, and bending over her work seemed so absorbed in it that the young man had not the courage to pursue his questions.

"Strange," he muttered; "one might suppose that you had deliberately planned the entire course of your life."

"Why should that seem strange, Gavriilo Petròvitch?" replied the young girl gently. "Probably even Illyà Ivànovitch [that was the cadet's name] has plans for the future, and he is younger than I."

“You are right,” remarked the cadet, flattered by this supposition. “Not long ago I read the biography of N ——. He too had definite plans for his life. He married at twenty, and was a commander at twenty-five.”

The student laughed sarcastically, and the young girl blushed.

“You see,” she said a moment later, in the same quiet tone, “every one plans his own career.”

No one replied, and a thoughtful silence fell upon the young people, — a silence beneath which a certain awkwardness was evident. They were all aware that the conversation had become personal ; and the rustle of the darkening and seemingly displeased old garden was all the sound they heard.

IV.

These conversations and discussions, this buoyant current of youthful life charged with its

questions, hopes, expectations, and opinions, came rushing like a passionate storm upon the blind youth. At first he listened to them with a look of surprise, but it was not long before he found that the stream rushed along paying no heed to him. No questions were asked him, neither was he invited to give his opinion ; and it soon became evident to him that he stood apart in a solitude, the sadder since brought into contrast with the present wide-awake life of the mansion. Nevertheless he listened to all this that was so new to him, and his contracted brow and pallid face bore witness to his intense interest. Yet this feeling was tinged with gloom ; his brain was swarming with bitter thoughts.

The mother looked sorrowfully at her son. Evelyn's eyes expressed sympathy and alarm. Maxim alone did not seem to notice the impression that this noisy company made upon his nephew, and hospitably invited the guests to come often, assuring the young men that he

would furnish them with abundant ethnographical material on their next visit.

The guests departed, promising to come again. The young men shook hands cordially with Peter when they said good-by. He nervously returned their pressure, and for a long time listened to the sound of the britchka as it rolled along the road. Then he turned suddenly and went into the garden.

After the departure of the guests everything at the manor lapsed into its former tranquillity ; but to the blind youth this silence seemed strange, unusual, and peculiar. It implied an acknowledgment that an important event had taken place on the estate. The silent garden-paths where he was wont to hear only the whisper of the beech-trees and the lilacs, now resounded in his fancy with the echoes of recent conversations. From the open window of the drawing-room he heard the voices of his mother and Evelyn arguing with Maxim. He was struck by the pathetic tone of entreaty

in his mother's voice, while that of Evelyn rang out with indignation ; Maxim meanwhile eagerly but firmly resisted the entreaties of the two women. Upon Peter's approach, these discussions instantly ceased.

Consciously, and with pitiless hand, Maxim had made the first breach in the wall which till now encompassed his nephew's world. The first noisy and tumultuous wave had already made its way through this breach, and the equilibrium of the young man's soul was shaken by its onslaught. Now he realized the limitations of his magic circle ; the quiet of the estate seemed oppressive to him, the indolent whisper and rustle of the old garden hung like a weight upon the peaceful dream of his young soul. Something wavered to and fro in the darkness, pressing toward him with wistful and enticing eagerness. It called and beckoned, awakening the questions that had been slumbering within him. The pallor of his face and a dull indefinite sense of misery in his

soul were the visible signs that the summons was heard. Maxim meanwhile was preparing for a second breach.

V.

When in the course of two weeks the young men accompanied by their father came to repeat their visit, Evelyn received them with a certain coolness. But she found it hard to resist the charming animation of youth. All day long the young men roamed about the village, hunting and taking notes of the songs of the reapers; and in the evening they assembled as before around the bench, near the mansion.

On one of these evenings, before Evelyn realized the fact, the conversation had turned to subjects of a somewhat personal character. Neither could the others have told how this had come about; it had been as imperceptible as the fading of the evening twilight, or the falling of the shadows in the garden, — as im-

perceptible as the first notes of the nightingale's song among the bushes. The young student spoke passionately, with a proud air of triumph, and with all that ardor peculiar to youth, which regardless of selfish calculations rushes to meet the unknown future. There was a strange fascination in this ardent faith, and something also akin to the indomitable power of a challenge.

The young girl blushed, for she felt that this challenge was perhaps unconsciously directed at her. She bent low over her work as she listened. Her eyes sparkled, her face flushed, her heart throbbed. The light faded from her eyes, her face grew pale, she compressed her lips; while her heart continued to beat still more violently, and a look of alarm came over her features. She was frightened, for under the influence of this student's words, the dark garden wall seemed to part before her eyes, and through the opening she saw the far-away vista of a vast world full of life and activity. She was startled. It seemed to her that some

one was about to pluck the knife from out her former wound.

This however was of short duration. Evelyn could control her own life; of that she was well aware. She had arrived at a decision in regard to her future life, and this decision was to be final; she had deliberated long concerning her first step in life, and proposed to act in accordance with her plan. This being accomplished, she would try to make the most of life. She turned her deep blue eyes from the student and looked toward the spot where Peter had been sitting. But he was no longer there.

Then quietly folding her work Evelyn rose also. "Excuse me, gentlemen," she said, addressing the guests, "if I leave you to yourselves for a while." And she started along the garden-path.

Evelyn was not the only person who had felt disturbed this evening. At the turn of the path, where the settle had been placed, the

young girl heard the agitated voices of Maxim and his sister.

“Yes, I thought of her in this connection no less than I did of him;” the old man was saying; and his tone was harsh. “I cannot believe that you wish to take advantage of the ignorance of a mere child.”

Tears were in the voice of Anna Michàilovna as she replied, “But Max, what if—if she — What will become of my boy?”

Maxim had no time to reply. The young girl who had paused instinctively at the turning, now quickly advanced, and with proudly erect head walked past the speakers. Maxim involuntarily drew up his crutch that it might not be in her way, and Anna Michàilovna looked at her with an expression of love, mingled with adoration almost amounting to awe. The mother seemed conscious that this fair proud girl, who had just passed by with a look so angry and defiant, held in her hands the happiness or unhappiness of her son.

VI.

A ruined and abandoned mill stood in the garden. The wheels had ceased to turn, the cylinders were overgrown with moss, and the water trickled through the old locks in slender, never-ceasing streams. This was the blind youth's favorite resort. Here he would spend hours on the parapet of the dam, listening to the sound of the trickling water, which he later reproduced to perfection on the piano. But now he was thinking of other things. Rapidly he trod the path, his heart filled with bitterness, and his face distorted by suffering. He paused when he heard the young girl's light step; accustomed as he was to confide all his feelings to her, he felt no embarrassment in her presence.

Evelyn rested her hand on his shoulder as she asked, — "What is it? Why are you so sad?"

He did not reply at first, but turning, began

once more to pace up and down the path. The young girl walked beside him.

Thus a few minutes went by in silence. It seemed as if the presence of Evelyn had a tranquillizing influence upon Peter's mood; the keen pain diminished, his face grew more peaceful; the flood of sadness that had overwhelmed his soul began to subside, and a new sense of mingled pleasure and expectancy had taken possession of him. This feeling, to whose healing influence he had often yielded, he had never yet made an attempt to analyze. And now again his mood grew tender, although a shade of sadness still remained.

"Of course it made me feel sad," he said, after a moment's silence; "because I understood their words, although they were not directed toward me. I am useless, quite useless in the world. And why was I born into it?"

The girl glanced up at him with a look of alarm, and then as if with settled purpose

she bent her head and resumed her walk by his side.

The blind youth stopped short. “Why, I ask, was I born into the world? And another thing — It may perhaps be true, as old people say, that affairs have changed for the worse; yet in old times the blind fared better than they do now. There was work for them, and they had a place in life. Why was I not born in times when blind minstrels used to wander from place to place? I would then take my lyre, or bandur,¹ and go from city to city and through the villages and distant steppes, and wherever I appeared the people would gather around me, while I sang to them of the deeds of their fathers, glorious and heroic, stirring their holiest feelings, and inspiring them with energy and courage. Thus I too could play a part in life. But now, even that cadet with his shrill voice, — you heard what he said about marrying and being a commander. They

¹ Musical instrument, resembling a lute.

laughed at him ; but for me even that is unattainable."

Tears came into the young girl's eyes, widening with alarm. "You are excited by the student's talk." She tried to speak lightly, but her agitation betrayed itself in her voice.

"Yes," replied Peter, thoughtfully ; "and what an agreeable fellow he is ! He has a very pleasing voice."

"Yes, he is agreeable," said Evelyn, abstractedly ; and her tone evinced a certain tenderness. Then as if vexed with herself she suddenly exclaimed in a passionate voice : "No, I don't like him at all ! He has too much self-assurance ; and I think his voice is harsh and disagreeable."

Peter listened in surprise to this angry sally. The girl stamped her foot as she went on :

"And it is all the most perfect folly ! I know it has been a plan of Maxim's contriving. Oh, how it makes me hate him !"

"Why, Vèlya," expostulated the blind youth,

“how can you blame Uncle Maxim for what has happened?”

“Oh, he thinks himself extremely clever; and he has destroyed every vestige of humanity within his breast by all these plans and schemes. Don’t speak to me of those people! I should like to know how they gained the right to arrange other people’s lives?” She stopped abruptly, clenched her slender hands and burst into a flood of childlike tears.

Peter took her hand and pressed it sympathetically. He was taken by surprise. This outburst from the usually calm and self-controlled girl was both unexpected and mysterious. As he listened to her weeping he was conscious of a new and peculiar emotion stirring within his breast.

Suddenly she gave him a fresh surprise by withdrawing her hand and bursting into a fit of laughter. “How silly I am! What in the world am I crying about?” She wiped her eyes and went on good-naturedly: “One must

be just. They are both good, honest men, and what he said was all very well ! But it does not apply to every one."

"To every one who has the power," replied the blind youth, scarce audibly.

"What nonsense !" she answered brightly ; but in spite of her cheerfulness the traces of recent tears could still be detected in her voice. "Take Maxim for instance ; he fought as long as he was able, and now he lives as best he may. And we also — "

"You say *we*? Why do you say that?" interrupted Peter.

"Because — well — because sometime you will marry me, and our lives will be one."

Strangely confused and yet rejoicing, the blind young man drew back a step. "I — marry you? You mean — that you will — marry me?"

"Why, of course, of course !" she replied with mingled haste and agitation. "How dull you must be ! Can it be possible that you

have never thought of it? It seems so natural ! Whom could you marry if not me? ”

“ To be sure,” he assented in his inconsiderate egotism. But instantly reflecting,— “ Have you forgotten, Vèlya,” he said, taking her by the hand, “ what these young men have just been telling us about the education that girls receive in the great cities? Consider what a career lies open before you, while I — ”

“ Well, what about you? ”

“ I — am blind ! ” he ended in a somewhat illogical conclusion.

The girl smiled, but continued in the same tone : “ What if you are blind? I love you even so ; hence it follows that I must marry you. That is the way things happen ; what can we do about it? ”

He also smiled, and dropped his head after his usual pensive fashion, as though he were listening to some voice within his soul. No sound could be heard save the gentle rippling of the water ; and even that low murmur

seemed at times to die away, but only to return with greater force, and ripple on forever. The leaves of the luxuriant wild cherry-tree whispered to one another, and the last pensive trills of the nightingale's song echoed through the garden.

By this bold, unexpected, and yet gentle stroke the young girl had dispelled the lowering cloud that darkened the blind youth's heart. Inspired by the new feeling that had taken possession of his whole being, he fervently pressed her little hand in his. A faint almost imperceptible pressure was the response. Then he clasped her round the waist and drew her toward him, gently stroking her silken hair with his other hand.

"Please, let me go, darling," said the young girl, in low, shy tones as she released herself from his embrace.

Evelyn's soft voice thrilled the blind youth's heart. He made no effort to detain her, but as he yielded he heaved a profound sigh. He

heard her smoothing her hair. His heart throbbed in deep but pleasing excitement, and he could feel the hot blood surging with a force hitherto unknown. And when a moment later she said to him, "Come, let us go back to the company," he heard with delight and surprise a new music in her charming voice.

VII.

The hosts were in the little drawing-room, and all the guests had likewise assembled there ; the only missing members were Peter and Evelyn. Maxim was conversing with his old comrade, and the young men sat in silence beside the open windows. One could not fail to observe the strangely quiet yet expectant air that brooded over this little circle, as if each one had a premonition of an impending crisis. Although Maxim never interrupted his conversation, he kept all the while throwing swift, impatient glances toward the door. Pani Popèlska

was trying to play the amiable and devoted hostess, but her face bore a sad and almost guilty look. Pan Popèlski alone, who had grown a good deal stouter, but had lost none of his amiability, sat quietly dozing in his chair, waiting for supper.

All eyes turned in that direction when footsteps were heard on the terrace which led from the garden into the drawing-room. Within the broad, dusky doorway appeared the figure of Evelyn with the blind youth slowly mounting the steps behind her. The young girl, although conscious that every eye rested upon her, was not in the least embarrassed. Crossing the room with her usual composure, she smiled slightly as she met the glance that Maxim darted at her from beneath his brows, and her own eyes flashed back defiance. Maxim grew suddenly abstracted, and replied at random when a question was directly addressed to him. Pani Popèlska watched her son.

The young man followed the maiden, giving

no apparent heed to the direction in which she was leading him. When his slender form and pale face appeared against the background of the doorway, he seemed to pause on the threshold of that room so brightly lighted and filled with guests ; but after a moment's hesitation he crossed it with the air of one both absent-minded and intensely absorbed, went up to the piano, and opened it.

For the moment Peter seemed utterly unconscious of his surroundings, forgetful of the presence of strangers, and instinctively longing for his favorite instrument as a vent whereby to express the emotions that were filling his bosom. Having raised the piano-lid, with his fingers resting lightly on the keys he struck a few rapid chords. It was as if he were putting a question, half to the instrument and half to his own soul. Then with his hands still resting on the keys, he remained plunged in deep thought, while utter silence reigned in the little drawing-room. The night looked in through the dusky windows,

and here and there clusters of green leaves shining in the lamplight peered curiously in from the garden. The guests, their attention aroused by these few whispering chords, and influenced more or less by the strange inspiration that seemed to radiate from the face of the blind youth, sat in silent expectation.

But Peter remained as before, his eyes uplifted as if he were listening. Mingled emotions chased one another like billows through his heart. He had been uplifted by the tide of a new life, — even as a boat, after a long and peaceful rest upon the sandy shore, is suddenly tossed upward by the waves. Question, surprise, and unwonted excitement filled his mind. The blind eyes dilating, alternately sparkled and grew dim. For a moment one might imagine that he had not found within his soul the response for which he so eagerly listened ; but all at once, with the same eager face, as though he could no longer wait, he started, touched the keys, and upborne by new waves of emotion

surrendered himself to the tide that swept onward in full, resonant, and tumultuous chords. They gave voice to the countless memories of his past life which had thronged upon him, as with drooping head he sat there listening. The multitudinous voices of Nature, the moaning of the wind, the whispering of the forest, the ripple of the river, and that indefinite murmur which is lost in the remote distance could be heard, intermingling, forming a sort of background for the deep and inscrutable agitation that swells the heart and leaps up in the soul at the bidding of Nature's mysterious whisper, — a feeling not easily defined. Sadness? — why then is it so sweet? Joy? — then why is it so profoundly, so inexplicably sad?

All this was evoked by the blind musician's fingers, in low soft tones, at first hesitating and vague. His imagination strove as it were to gain control over this flood of chaotic images, and without success. Those powerful and depressing influences of an impetuous and pas-

sionate nature, confused and vague though they were, had taken full possession of the musician, but were as yet wholly beyond his control. From time to time the sounds grew in volume and power. One felt that the player must presently combine them into a melodious and perfect flood of harmony, and his audience listened in breathless expectation, Maxim wondering all the while as to the cause of the unusual depth of feeling displayed. But before the flood had time to rise to its full height, it suddenly subsided into a plaintive murmur, like a wave breaking into foam and spray ; and again nothing was heard but the sad lingering notes, that rang like questions in the air.

The blind man paused for a moment, but the silence in the drawing-room remained uninterrupted, save by the rustling noise of the leaves in the garden. The fascination which had transported his listeners far beyond these walls suddenly vanished, and until the musician again struck the keys of the instrument they

realized that they were seated in a small room, with the dark night peering in at the windows. Again the sounds rose and fell as if vainly seeking after the unknown. Charming folk-songs were interwoven with the vague harmony of the chords, — songs telling of love and sorrow, or reminiscences of the glories and sufferings of by-gone days, or the eager impetuosity of youth and hope, — the blind man thus striving to express his feelings by embodying them in forms already familiar to his imagination. But the song too ended with the same minor note, — like an unanswered question echoing through the silence of the little drawing-room.

Then for the third time Peter began to play a piece which he had once learned by heart, — and again broke off.

Possibly he had hoped to find the musical genius of the composer in sympathy with his mood.

VIII.

It is a very difficult matter for a blind man to play by note. These are printed in relief like the letters which they use ; each note has its special sign, and stands in a row like the lines of a book. To designate the notes that form the chords, raised points are placed between them. It is of course a difficult and complicated task for a blind person to learn these by heart, each hand separately ; but in Peter's case the labor was lightened by his love for the integral parts of the work. Memorizing a few chords for one hand at a time, he would place himself at the piano ; and when, from the combining of these hieroglyphics in relief, all of a sudden surprising harmonies resulted, it gave him a delight keen enough to enliven the otherwise dull work, and render it fascinating.

Yet even so, there still remained a weary way between the printed sheets of music and the execution of the same ; for in order that

the signs might be embodied in melody, the hands had first to transmit them to the memory, and the memory in its turn to send them back to the fingers. Meanwhile, however, Peter's strongly developed musical instinct and imagination, that had already taken a definite form, began to play a part in the complicated labor of memorizing, and to stamp the work of the composer with the distinct impress of the player's own individuality. Thus far the form which his musical feeling had taken, was for the most part derived from his mother's playing. All Nature spoke to his soul in the language and music of the folk-songs of his native land.

While with beating heart and soul overflowing with emotion, Peter now played this piece, from the very first resonant chords there was such brilliancy, animation, and genuine feeling, and at the same time something so characteristic of the player, that an expression of wonder was mingled with delight on the faces of the listen-

ers. The next moment, however, the wonder was wholly merged in delight ; and the elder Stavruchènko's son, a professional musician, as he listened, strove for a long time to follow the familiar piece, and at the same time to analyze the peculiar " style " of the pianist.

Music recognizes no party ; it stands aloof from the clashing of opinions. If the eyes of the young people sparkled and their faces flushed, and daring conceptions of future life and happiness sprang up in their minds, so also the eyes of the old sceptic sparkled with animation.

At first old Stavruchènko sat with bowed head, listening in silence ; but little by little he grew animated, and gently touching Maxim whispered, " How finely he plays ! Wonderfully, it must be confessed ! By Jove ! — "

As the sounds swelled a thought came into his mind, probably of his youth ; for his eyes sparkled, his face flushed, he straightened himself, and raising his arm seemed about to dash

his clenched hand upon the table, but restraining himself, allowed it to fall silently. Casting one rapid glance at his boys, he stroked his mustache, and leaning toward Maxim, whispered: "They talk of putting us old people into the archives. Nonsense! There was a time when you and I — And even now — Is it not true?"

Anna Michàilovna looked inquiringly at Evelyn. The girl had folded her work on her knees, and sat watching the blind musician but her blue eyes expressed nothing beyond a rapt attention. She was interpreting those sounds in her own way; she fancied she could hear in them the pattering sound of the water in the old locks, and the whisper of the wild cherry-tree in the dusky avenue.

IX.

But the face of the blind man showed none of the rapture that had taken possession of his

audience. It was plain that even this piece had not given him the satisfaction he was looking for. The last notes vibrated like the others, intimating the same question, — a murmur of dissatisfaction ; and as the mother looked at her son's face she saw in it an expression which was familiar to her. The sunny day of that far-away spring was revived in her memory, when her boy lay prostrated on the bank of the river, overcome by the too vivid emotions of the new and exciting world of spring. This expression however rested but for a moment on Peter's face, then vanished.

Now the hum of voices filled the parlor. Stavruchènko embraced the musician with enthusiasm. "By Jove ! my dear fellow, you play finely ! That is the kind of playing we like !"

The young people, still excited and agitated, were shaking hands with him. The student prophesied a world-wide fame for him as an artist. "That is true," assented the elder brother. "You are fortunate to have become

thoroughly familiar with the character of the folk-songs. You are a perfect master in that domain. But will you tell me, please, what was the last piece you played?"

Peter gave the name of an Italian piece.

"I thought so," replied the young man. "I am somewhat familiar with it. You have a remarkably original style. Many play it more correctly than you, but no one has ever yet played it with such effect."

"Why do you think that others play it more correctly?" asked his brother.

"Well — how can I convey my meaning? I have always heard it performed just as it is written. While this sounds like a translation from the Italian into Little Russian."

The blind man listened attentively. It was a new thing for him to be the centre of animated conversation, and he was proud to feel his power. So he too might accomplish something in life!

As he sat there, with his hand resting on the

music-rack, listening to all this talk, suddenly a warm touch fell on his hand. It was Evelyn, who had drawn near, and who now with a fugitive pressure of his fingers whispered joyously : “ You hear? You too will have work in the world. If you could only see the effect you produce on others by your playing ! ”

The blind man started and drew himself erect. No one but the mother noticed this little interlude. Her face flushed as deeply as if she had just received the first kiss of a new-born and passionate love.

The blind man still remained on the same spot, and his face had not yet lost its pallor. Overwhelmed as he was by the impressions of his new happiness, he may also have felt the approach of the storm that like a dark and shapeless cloud was rising out of the depths of his brain.





*AN ATTEMPT AT SYNTHESIS *

·VI·



THE
CRISIS

An attempt
at Synthesis.

ON the following day the blind man awoke early. All was quiet in his room, neither was there as yet any movement in the house. Through the window which had remained open into the garden during the night came the freshness of the early morning. His memory had not yet recalled to him the events of the previous day, but his whole being was filled with a new and unusual sensation.

Peter lay for several moments in bed, listening to the twitter of a bird in the garden and to the feelings stirring within his own heart. "What has happened to me?" he thought; and at this very moment the words which were spoken to him in the twilight, near the old mill, flashed into his mind: "Is it possible that you had never thought of this? How dull you are."

It was true, Peter had never thought of it. Evelyn's presence had always been a joy to him, but until yesterday he had never realized the fact, any more than one realizes the air he breathes. Those simple words had fallen into his soul like a pebble upon the glassy surface of a stream: one moment it was placid, serenely reflecting the sunlight and the blue sky, — a toss of the pebble, and it is shaken to its very depths. Now he awoke like one newly born, and Evelyn — his old companion — appeared to him in an altered light. As he recalled one by one the incidents of yesterday, even the

most minute, he heard with fresh surprise the accents of her altered voice as reproduced by his imagination, — “How stupid you are!” “Don’t, my darling!”

Instantly Peter rose, dressed himself, and ran through the dewy garden to the old mill. The water was murmuring and the wild-cherry bushes whispering the same as ever, — only then it had been dark, and now it was a bright sunny morning. Never before had light produced so palpable an effect upon him. The bright rays of the cheerful sun seemed to mingle with the dewy fragrance and the universal freshness of the early morning, stirring his nerves to a gentle excitement.

But together with this pleasing agitation there arose in the inmost depths of the blind man’s heart another and a different feeling, so vague and shapeless that at first he did not even realize its presence; but gradually it grew to be a part of himself, like the strain of melancholy that sometimes weaves itself impercep-

tibly through a merry song. It rose from the depths of his soul as from small beginnings a heavy cloud gathers in the heated atmosphere ; and just as a cloud is expanded by rain, so was this emotion deepened by rising tears, until it grew to predominate over every other feeling. It was but recently that her words had sounded in his ears, and he could remember every detail of that first explanation ; he seemed still to feel her silken hair and to hear the throbbing of her heart against his own. And out of all this he wrought an image that made his own heart beat with joy. Yet now a dark and shapeless “ something ” rises to blight this image with its poisonous breath, and to cause it to vanish into empty air.

In vain did Peter go afterward to the mill and spend hours at a time there, beset by contending feelings, endeavoring to recall to his imagination Evelyn’s words, her voice, and her movements. He had lost the power that once he possessed of uniting them in one harmonious

whole. From the very beginning there had been an intangible "something" that he had been unable to grasp; and now this "something" was rising above his head, as a storm-cloud rises from the horizon. The sound of her voice was hushed, all the impressions of that happy evening had grown dim, and behold a void was in their place, to fill which void there rose from the depths of the blind man's soul a yearning desire. He longed to see her. The sudden shock that had roused that evenly balanced youthful nature from its brief slumber had likewise awakened the fatal element that contained within itself the germs of irrepressible suffering. He loved her, and longed to see her.

II.

Their guests had once more left them, and life returned to its usual regularity at the Popèlski manor; but the temper of the blind man had undergone a decided change. It had be-

come variable and easily agitated. When at times his happy moments rose vividly before him, he grew more cheerful, and his face brightened. But this did not last long; and in the course of time even these cheerful moments were dimmed by the fear that they were about to vanish, never to return. Thus his temper grew very uneven; outbursts of demonstrative affection and of extreme nervous excitement were often succeeded by days of secret gloom and melancholy. And at last the mother's worst fears were realized,—the fevered dreams of childhood returned to the youth.

One morning Anna Michàilovna went into her son's room. He was still sleeping, but with a strange and restless sort of slumber. His eyes were partly open, and seemed to peer from beneath his eyelids; his face was pale, and wore an expression of alarm.

The mother paused as she cast a scrutinizing glance at her son, trying to discover the cause of this mysterious terror, which seemed mo-

mently to increase. But as she watched, the strained expression on the sleeper's face grew more intense. Suddenly she became aware of an almost imperceptible movement above the bed. A sunbeam was shining on the wall over the head of the sleeper, and as it glided downward its vibrations grew more and more rapid. This brilliant ray of light was stealing its way to the half-open eyes, and the nearer it came the greater grew the restlessness of the sleeper. Anna Michàilovna remained motionless, as if gazing at a nightmare ; she could not turn her eyes from the golden beam, which was drawing slowly but perceptibly nearer and nearer to her son's pale face, which had become almost rigid under the prolonged strain. The yellow light had now begun to play over the hair and forehead of the youth. Instinctively the mother leaned forward to shield him, but her feet refused to move, as if she too were under some mesmeric influence. Meanwhile the sleeper raised his eyelids, and the sunbeam sparkled on

his motionless eye-balls. His head, outlined against the pillow, was turned toward the light ; something between a smile and a sob quivered on his lips, and again his face lapsed into its former rigidity.

At last, by a supreme effort of will, the mother overcame the torpor that had crept over her, and going up to the bed, placed her hand on her son's head. He started and awoke.

“Is that you, mamma?” he asked.

“Yes, it is I.”

He rose on his elbow. It was as if his consciousness were still obscured by a sort of haze. The next moment he said: “I was dreaming again. I often dream now; but I can remember nothing.”

III.

More than a year passed thus; periods of gloom alternating in the young man's nature with a nervous irritability; and at the same

time his senses, especially that of hearing, grew more and more acute. That his entire organism was susceptible to the light was evident even by night ; he always knew when the moon was shining, and would often remain out of doors, sitting motionless and sad, when all the others in the house were sleeping,— giving himself up to the influence of that dreamy and fantastic light, his pale face meanwhile turned ever in the direction of the luminous globe that was traversing the dark-blue sky, and his eyes reflecting the lustre of its cold rays. But when the globe, growing larger and larger as it drew near the earth, became veiled by a heavy red mist and finally disappeared below the horizon line, the face of the blind man would soften and grow calm, and he would rise and go to his room.

As to his thoughts during these long nights, it would not be easy to describe them. Every one who has experienced the joys and sorrows of self-consciousness is familiar with the crisis

that occurs at a certain period of life, when a man, still pausing on the threshold strives to define to himself the place he occupies in Nature, his object in life, and his relations to the surrounding world. This is, so to speak, a “dead point ;” and fortunate is the man whom the impetus of life’s power carries through it unharmed. In Peter’s case this crisis was seriously complicated. To the question, “What is the object of one’s life?” he added another : “What is the object of a blind man’s life?” Finally, into this travail of sad thoughts entered another element,—an almost physical pressure of unsatisfied desire, which re-acted on his disposition ; he grew more and more nervous and irritable, without an apparent cause.

“ I long to see,” he said when this mood had so far relaxed that he could speak of it with Evelyn, — “ I long to see, and I cannot overcome this desire. Could I but once, even in a dream, see heaven and earth and the bright sunlight, and remember it all, — could I

but thus see my father and mother, you and Uncle Maxim, — I should be satisfied, and never be distressed again.”

And he persistently clung to that idea. When alone he would take up different objects, feel of them with unusual attention, and then putting them aside try to recall their familiar outlines. In the same way he studied the difference between bright-colored surfaces, which the abnormally keen perceptions of his nervous system enabled him to distinguish quite readily by the touch. But all this simply conveyed to Peter's mind information in regard to his own relations to things, without giving him a clearly defined idea of their intrinsic properties. He could distinguish the difference between day and night from the fact that the sunbeams, in some mysterious way, penetrated his brain, irritating still more keenly his agonizing queries.

IV.

Peter had lost all interest in the books that Maxim used to read aloud to him, and nothing ever arrested his attention now, unless it bore directly or indirectly upon his own affairs. Once he interrupted the reading to ask, —

“ *Red ringing; carmine ringing*, — what does that mean? Can one see colors in tones? ”

“ No,” replied Maxim; “ but some sounds make an impression analogous to that of colors. I am not sure that I shall be doing right, or even if I shall succeed in explaining this analogy to you so that you will be able to understand it; but I have often thought of it myself, and this is the way it appears to me: Whenever I look upon a bright red surface of any considerable dimensions, it produces on me the impression of something flexible and quivering. It seems as if this red surface were changing every instant; rising from a substratum of a deeper color. it throbs, so to speak, with swift pulsa-

tions of a lighter shade, making a most vivid impression on the eyes. That may be the reason why a certain kind of ringing is called red."

"Yes, yes! wait a moment," said Peter, quickly opening the piano; and with practised hand he struck the key-board in imitation of the holiday bell-ringing. The illusion was unusually perfect. A chord in the middle register served as a background, while the clearer high notes rose over it as though leaping and bounding through the air.

"Is that it?" asked the blind man.

"Yes, that is like it; and I know persons who are as unpleasantly affected by those sounds as I myself am affected by the color. I believe the expression 'carmine ringing' refers to post-bells. After a bell has been ringing for a long time it grows monotonous, — the sound becomes deeper, softer, and more uniform, although it is still as distinct as ever. The same effect may be obtained by a skilful selection of the different tones."

“Now, listen,” said Peter; and under his fingers the piano rang out like the spasmodic peals of a post-bell.

“No, that is not the way,” said Maxim. “You must play more softly.”

“Ah, yes, I remember!”

And now the instrument sent forth tones, low, rhythmical, and sad, like the music of a “set of bells” under the *dugà* of a Russian *tròika*, receding along the dusty road in the dim vista of evening,—a sound low and monotonous, growing softer and softer, until the last notes are lost amid the silence of the quiet fields.

“Ah, now you have it! You have caught the idea,” said Maxim. “Our language possesses certain definitions applicable to our conceptions of sound and light, as well as of touch. Thus we use the word ‘brilliant’ in regard to tones, and also in regard to colors; and the word ‘soft’ belonging primarily to the sense of touch, may also be applied to colors. We even

say a ' warm ' color, a ' cold ' color. Of course this is only by way of analogy, but they show some points of resemblance. Some time ago, while you were still a child, your mother tried to explain colors to you by means of sounds."

"Yes, I remember. Why did you forbid us to continue? Perhaps I might have succeeded in understanding."

"No," replied Maxim, "that would have been impossible, and all your labor would have been in vain. You can study an object by itself, as far as its form and the space it occupies are concerned,—and you seem able, in some inscrutable way, to perceive vague differences in color ; but in order to gain any distinct ideas of form, size, and color the sense of sight is absolutely indispensable. The sooner you give up your vain efforts the better it will be for you."

Peter made no reply ; but afterward he returned to those musical experiments that had been given up in days gone by. While he by

the sense of touch would examine bits of bright-colored cloth, his mother — her nerves strained to their utmost tension, and trembling with agitation — would try to represent the color by a correspondence in sound.

Maxim no longer opposed these performances ; he realized that his influence was of no avail against that inward impulse, and felt that it would be better to allow the blind man to pursue his own course, that in the end he might be convinced that all his efforts to combine these separate impressions were utterly in vain. And that this result might be the sooner attained, Maxim lent his own assistance to promote the blind man's researches.

“Uncle Maxim,” said Peter to him one day, “you once described red to me by means of words so vividly, I wish you would tell me about the other colors that you see in Nature.”

Maxim paused to consider. “That is a very difficult matter ; but I will try. I will begin by describing to you something with which you are

perfectly familiar, and that is blood. Blood courses through the veins, but it cannot be seen. It circulates through the body, diffused by the heart, which is constantly throbbing, beating, and burning with sorrow or joy. When a sudden thought occurs to you, or when from dreams you awake trembling and weeping, it is because the heart has given a more rapid impulse to the blood, and sent it coursing in bright streams to the brain. Well, this blood is red."

"Red, warm," said the young man, thoughtfully.

Maxim paused: was it well for him to go on with these fruitless illustrations? But when he saw the eagerness with which the blind man was hanging on his words, he sighed, and made up his mind to continue.

"First, I will tell you about the heavens. If you lift your arm above your head, you will describe with it a semi-circle in space. In the same way, infinitely far above us, we behold

the vaulted semi-circle of the hemisphere. It is blue. We call it the sky. The sun crosses it from east to west, — that you already know. You can also tell when the sky is overcast ; at such times its blue depths are hidden by the confused and portentous outlines of dense masses of clouds. You always perceive the approach of a threatening storm-cloud — ”

“ Yes, I am conscious of an influence that agitates the soul.”

“ You are right. A blue sky is the symbol of serene and lasting happiness. We watch for the return of the dark-blue sky. The tempest will pass over, while the sky above remains ever the same ; knowing this, we can wait patiently for the passage of the storm. The sky then is blue ; and the sea when it is calm is of the same color. Your mother has blue eyes, and Evelyn’s eyes are also blue.”

“ Like the sky,” murmured the blind man, tenderly.

“ Blue eyes are said to be the token of

a pure soul. Now I will tell you about the earth. A little while ago it was spring ; now the summer has come, and the surface of the ground is nearly all covered with green grass. The earth is black ; and in the early spring the trunks and branches of the trees look black too, and moist ; but no sooner are these dark surfaces warmed by the rays of the sun than they send forth green grass and leaves. Vegetation requires light and warmth ; but the amount must not be excessive. The reason why all that is green is so grateful to the eye, is that it seems like the union of warmth and cool moisture ; it arouses sensations of calm contentment and health, but not those of passion, or what the world calls happiness. Do you understand ? ”

“ No, it is not quite clear. But please go on.”

“ Well, I don’t know that I can make that clearer ; but I will tell you more. The summer grows hotter and brighter as it goes on. All

vegetation seems to be oppressed with its own vitality ; the leaves droop, and if the heat of the sun is not cooled by the refreshing rain, the green vegetation grows utterly parched and withers away. But with the approach of autumn, the juicy fruit begins to ripen among the brown and faded leaves, reddening most on the side next the sun, as if all the intensity and passion of vegetable nature were concentrated therein. You see that even here red is as ever the symbol of passion. It is the color of luxury and delight ; the color of sin, anger, and madness ; the emblem of unforgiving vengeance. — But you fail to follow me ! ”

“ Never mind ; go on, go on ! ”

“ The autumn comes. The fruit has grown heavy ; it drops and falls to the ground, — it dies ; but the seed still lives, — and therein lies the germ of a ‘ possibility ’ of some future plant, with its luxuriant foliage and its fruit. The seed falls on the ground ; and above this ground the cold sun hangs low, the cold wind

sweeps over it, the cold clouds float overhead. So life and the passions die slowly, imperceptibly. Day by day the blackness of the soil shows more and more plainly through the green grass, until at last the day comes when the snowflakes fall by millions and cover the ground, humble and sorrowful in its widowhood, with a mantle of one uniform color, — cold, and white. The cold snow, the clouds that float in the inaccessible heights above our heads, the grand and sterile mountain-peaks, all are white. It is the emblem of a passionless nature, of the cold purity of holiness, and of the future spiritual life. As to black — ”

“ I know,” interrupted the blind man, “ *that* signifies silence and quiescence. It is night.”

“ Yes ; and therefore the emblem of death.”

Peter shuddered, and said in a low tone : “ Yes, — as you say yourself, — of death. And for me black is the prevailing color ! ”

“ You are wrong to say that,” rejoined Maxim unhesitatingly, “ when you have access

to all the pleasures of sound, warmth and movement."

"Yes," replied the young man, thoughtfully, "that is true. Sounds also have their colors; and I have learned to know the red tones, the green and the majestic white ones, that soar aloft in inaccessible heights. But those nearest akin to me are the dark tones of grief, which reverberate close to the earth. I never rejoice when I play, — I weep."

"Let me tell you," said Maxim earnestly, "of one gift which you fail to appreciate at its proper value, — one that has been bestowed upon you with a generosity rarely found among mortals. We have already spoken of light, warmth, and sound. But you know still another joy, — you are surrounded by love. You take little heed of this, and the reason of your suffering may be ascribed to an egotistic cherishing of your own woes."

"Yes," exclaimed Peter, passionately, "I cherish them against my will! Where can

I hide from them, when they are with me wherever I go?"

"Could you once realize that the world is full of sorrow a hundredfold harder to bear than yours, — sorrows in comparison with which your life, rich in consolations and sympathy, may well be called bliss, — then —"

"No, no! it is not so!" interrupted the blind man, angrily, in his former tone of passionate excitement. "I would change places with the lowest beggar; gladly would I wear his rags! He sees!"

"Very well," said Maxim, coldly, "I will prove to you that you are mistaken."

V.

In a small town, sixty versts from the estate of the Popèlski, stands a miraculous Roman Catholic image. Persons versed in such matters could detail accurate accounts of its miraculous power, and all who make a pilgrimage to visit it

on its holiday receive "twenty days absolution." Therefore every year, on a certain day in the fall, the little town is so crowded that it can hardly be recognized. On the occasion of the anniversary, the old chapel is decorated with flowers and foliage; the merry pealing of the bells rings through the air, the carriages of the Pans roll past; the town is filled with worshippers, bivouacking in the streets and squares and even in the neighboring fields. Nor are Catholics the only visitors. The reputation of the N—— image has spread far and wide, and the sick and afflicted Orthodox, particularly those from the cities, come also to visit it.

On this particular holiday of which we would now speak, the road on both sides of the chapel was lined with a many-colored procession of human beings. One viewing this spectacle from the summit of any of the low hills encircling the place might have imagined that some gigantic serpent had stretched itself out over the road near the chapel, and lay there

motionless, save when from time to time it lifted its many-colored scales. On both sides of the road, lined with two far-reaching rows of men and women, stood a whole regiment of beggars in a line, stretching their hands for alms.

Maxim on his crutches, and Peter beside him leaning on Joachim's arm, moved slowly along the street. Having passed the noisiest and most crowded spot, they came to the road where it entered the field. The hum of the many-voiced crowd, the cries of the Jewish tradesmen, the noise of the carriages, — all that vast rumbling as of mighty waves, mingled into one continuous surging volume of sound, they had left behind them. But even here where the crowd had diminished, they could still hear the tramp of the foot-passengers and the hum of the wheels and human voices. A carriage-train of teamsters was coming from the direction of the fields, and creaking heavily, turned into the nearest cross street.

Peter listened absent-mindedly to this noisy life, wondering why Maxim had brought him there on such a day. Although Pan Popèlski was a Catholic himself, the child had been baptized in the mother's church by an Orthodox priest, and this was no holiday of his. Nevertheless he obediently followed Maxim, once in a while pulling his overcoat together, for it was chilly weather; and thus he walked along, his mind a prey to melancholy thoughts. Suddenly in the midst of his absorption, Peter's attention was so violently arrested that he shuddered as he paused. The last houses of the city buildings ended here, and the wide thoroughfare now lay between fences and empty lots. Just where it entered the fields, some pious hands had erected a stone post, with an icon and a lantern; the latter, which was never lighted, now hung creaking in the wind. At the very foot of the post crouched a group of blind beggars, who had been crowded from the desirable places by their more fortunate com-

petitors. They sat there holding wooden cups, and some of them from time to time set up a heart-rending wail : —

“Give to the blind ! — for Christ’s sake !”

It was a cold day, and since early morning these beggars had been exposed to the cold wind that blew in gusts from the field. The crowd was so great that they could not keep themselves warm by exercise, and as by turns they drawled their mournful lamentation, the plaintive note of physical suffering and of utter helplessness could plainly be discerned. The first words were quite distinct, but they were soon lost in a mournful wail, expiring in a shudder as of one perishing from the cold. And yet the last low notes of the song, almost lost in the midst of the noisy street, on reaching the human ear struck it with a sense of the hopelessness of the enormous suffering they expressed.

“What is that?” exclaimed Peter, seizing his uncle suddenly by the arm. His face

changed, as though this moan were the embodied image of some ghost that suddenly rose before him.

“That?” repeated Maxim, indifferently. “They are only blind beggars,—blind like yourself, and somewhat cold besides. They would like to go home, but they are hungry. You have some money in your pocket, have you not? Throw them a five-copeck piece.”

Peter, who in his anguish had rushed ahead, suddenly stopped. He took out his purse, and instinctively turning away that he might not hear the mournful strains repeated, held it out to Maxim, saying,—

“Give them this! Give them all you have with you,—only let us go away! For mercy’s sake, let us go home as quickly as possible! I cannot, I cannot bear to hear it!”

VI.

On the following day Peter was lying in his room prostrated with a nervous fever. He lay tossing on his bed, with a look of agony on his face, as if he heard some sound from which he was struggling to escape. The old local doctor attributed this illness to a cold, but Maxim well knew its real cause. It was a severe attack, and at the time of the crisis the sick man lay motionless for several days; but youth came off victorious in the end.

One pleasant autumn morning a bright sunbeam crept in at the window and rested near the invalid's head. Anna Michàilovna turning to Evelyn said, "Please draw the shade. I dread that light."

Rising in obedience to her request, the girl was arrested by the unexpected sound of the blind man's voice : —

"Never mind, please. Let it be as it is."

Both women leaned over him with rapture :

“Do you know me?” asked the mother.

“Yes,” replied the invalid; then paused, as though trying to recall some memory of the past. “Ah, yes!” he said softly. “How dreadful it was!”

Evelyn laid her hand on his lips. “Don’t, don’t! You must not talk; it is bad for you.”

Pressing the hand to his lips Peter covered it with kisses. Tears stood in his eyes. He wept long and freely, and seemed to gain relief. “I shall never forget your lesson,” he said, turning his face toward Maxim, who entered at that moment. “I thank you. You have helped me to realize my own happiness, by making me acquainted with the woes of others. God grant that I may never forget the lesson!”

The disease once conquered, the youthful constitution made short work of recovery. In two weeks Peter was again on his feet. A great change had taken place in him. The serious shock to his nerves was succeeded by a

pensive but calm and gentle sadness ; his very features were changed, having lost all trace of the old mental suffering.

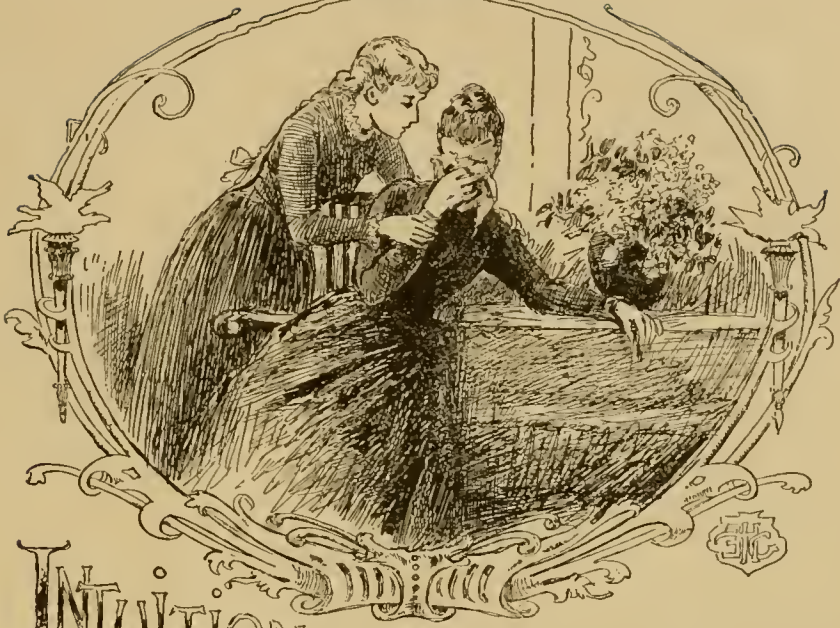
Maxim feared lest this might prove but a phase, occasioned by the depression of the nervous system. But months went by, and still the blind man's mood showed no sign of change.

The realization of one's own misfortunes sometimes paralyzes the energy, and plunges the soul into a state of passive endurance ; while the knowledge of the sorrows of others will, on the contrary, often rouse one to energetic action, and uplifting the whole nature stimulate mental activity, and lead one to seek opportunities for showing sympathy.

A longing to relieve human misery had now risen in Peter's heart, supplanting his former vain endeavor to escape from personal grief. He had as yet no clear idea as to the ways and means, and had but slender confidence in his own power ; yet he was inspired by hope.



· INTUITION ·



INTUITION. When Evelyn announced to the old Yaskùlskis her firm intention of marrying the blind man, the old mother wept ; but the father, after saying a prayer to the images, declared that it was manifestly the will of God. In due course of time, therefore, the wedding was celebrated.

Now began a new and happy life for Peter ; and yet it made no great change in him. In his happiest moments there was a shade of sad-

ness in his smile, as if he felt the insecurity of his happiness. When he was told that he was about to become a father, he received the news with alarm. Still his present life, absorbed as it was in anxiety for his wife and future child, left him no time for brooding over the inevitable. Now and then, in the midst of these cares the memory of that pitiful wail of the blind men would rise in his mind and wring his heart with pity and compassion, thereby diverting his thoughts into a different channel.

The blind man had also lost to a certain extent his extreme sensitiveness to the outward impressions made by light, and his mental activity was proportionately diminished. The turbulent organic force within him lay for the moment dormant, with no conscious effort of will on his part to rouse it into action, or to combine his manifold sensations into one consistent whole. But who can tell? — this interior calmness may have served to promote the work that was unconsciously to himself going on

within him ; it may have facilitated the union of those vague sensations of light with his logical thoughts on the subject, and the analogies between light and sound. We know that in dreams the mind often creates images and ideas which it would be totally unable to produce by the agency of the will.

II.

In the very same room where Peter was born, no sound could be heard save the wailing cry of an infant. A few days had passed since its birth, and Evelyn was rapidly recovering. But Peter still seemed depressed, as though weighed down by the presentiment of some impending misfortune.

The doctor taking the child in his arms carried him to the window. Quickly drawing aside the curtain and admitting a bright sunbeam into the room, he took his instruments and bent at once over the boy. Peter was also

in the room, apathetic and depressed, with his head drooping low. He seemed to attach no importance whatever to the investigations of the doctor; his bearing was that of one who feels quite sure of the result.

“The child must be blind,” he kept repeating. “Better for it, too, had it never been born.”

The young doctor made no reply, but continued his observations in silence. At last he laid aside the ophthalmoscope, and his calm, encouraging voice echoed through the room: “The pupil contracts; the child sees!”

Peter started, and rose instantly to his feet. But although the act gave proof that he heard the doctor’s words, the expression of his face showed no comprehension of their significance. Resting his trembling hands upon the window-seat, and with his pale face and set features uplifted, he looked like one petrified. Until the present moment he had been in a state of

unusual excitement, apparently unconscious of himself, and yet every nerve quivering with expectation. The darkness that surrounded him was an actual object, which he realized in all its immensity as something apart from himself, enveloping him as it were, while he strove to gain by an effort of imagination some adequate idea of its relation to himself. He threw himself before it as if he would shield his child from that illimitable tossing sea of impenetrable darkness.

Such had been Peter's state of mind while the doctor was silently carrying on his preparations. He had wavered between hope and fear ; but now the latter, rising to its highest pitch, had won entire control of his excited nerves, while hope withdrew to the innermost recesses of his heart. Then came the words, "The child sees !" and his feelings underwent a sudden transformation ; his fears vanished, and assurance took the place of hope, illuminating the inner world of imagination in which the

blind man dwelt. Like a stroke of lightning it burst upon the darkness of his soul, effecting a complete revolution. Now he knew the meaning of the words, "sound possessing the attribute of light." The doctor's words were like a pillar of fire in his brain ; it was as if an electric spark had suddenly kindled in the secret recesses of his soul. Everything vibrated within him, and he himself quivered, as a tightly strung chord quivers under a sudden touch.

Directly upon this flash, strange shapes rose before those eyes blind from birth. Were these rays of light, or sounds? He could not tell. They seemed like vivified sounds, that had taken the form and the motion of light. They were radiant as the firmament, and their course was as that of the sun in the heavens above ; waving to and fro, they whispered and rustled like the green steppe, and swayed like the branches of the pensive beech-trees. And all the time these branches were mysteriously but clearly outlined against the sky ; the steppe

stretched far, far away ; the bright blue surface of the river rippled musically.

Some one touched the blind man's hand. Yes ! he knows, he hears, he feels, he sees this touch ! Here again come the ray-sounds, shaping themselves into visible images. From his childhood he has known that bright vision, so dear to his heart, reproduced in his soul with such marvellous fidelity ! He hears his mother's gentle voice ; her tender blue eyes rest lovingly and sadly upon his face, and somewhere in the depths of his heart the reflection of her gaze faintly glimmers. The silvery white hair, the clear, pure ringing tones of her voice, — he not only hears, he also sees and feels that fondly loved, that pure and gentle being, the embodiment of holy love !

A young, anxious, and sympathetic cry ! — His heart beats with passionate excitement. Can it be that he has never seen her before, — his friend, his wife, his best-beloved ? Behold, she now lies before him, distinct and wonderful !

Pain, love, and alarm may be seen upon her face — Eyes blue like his mother's; and in her voice the scarlet tones of love, vivid and intense, unlike that of a mother, — those tones that kindled in his heart the bright flame of passion! She has light “fair” hair, — he knew of course it must be so; he felt it and now he sees it. He is conscious with every instinct of his being that she half rises from her bed, her eyes dilating to greet his rapture.

And this? — A discord; the tapping of a crutch; a stifled exclamation! He reaches out his hands toward the tutor who has devoted his life to him. He knows the keen glance, the dogged persistency, the energetic voice, the heavy and ungainly figure that seems to belong to the harsh, abrupt tones, — a succession of discordant sounds against a background of controlled emotions!

But now again comes the darkness, sweeping once more in waves across the blind man's brain; and this form loses all distinctness of

outline, and the other images waver and mingle one with the other, and all that is left glides down the gigantic radius into utter darkness ! Thus intermingling, wavering, trembling, like the vibrations of a slender wire, first high and loud, then soft and low, these image-sounds were hushed at last.

Silence and darkness, with certain vague object-sounds, fantastic of outline, yet still striving to rise to the surface ! Peter could not grasp their tones, forms, or colors, but somewhere from the depths he could still hear the resonant modulations of the scale, and seemed to see the rows of ivory keys flashing in the darkness, as they glided down into space. Suddenly the sounds began to reach him in their ordinary way. It was as if he had just waked, and bright and joyous began to press the hands of Maxim and of his mother.

“What is it ?” asked his mother, in alarm.

“Nothing ! I thought I — saw you all. I am not sleeping, am I ?”

“And now?” she asked anxiously. “Do you remember? Shall you remember?”

The blind man breathed a deep sigh. “Nothing,” he replied with an effort. “I shall transmit it all — I have already transmitted it to the child.”

The blind man tottered, and fell fainting to the floor. His face was pale, but a gleam of joy and satisfaction still rested upon it.







A large number of persons had assembled in Kiev during the period of the Contracts to hear the musical improviser. He was blind ; but marvellous reports had been circulated in regard to his musical talent. Therefore the Contract hall was crowded ; and a lame old gentleman, a relative of the artist, had taken charge of the proceeds, — all which were to be devoted to some charitable object, unknown to the public.

Complete silence reigned in the hall when a young man, with a pale face and beautiful large eyes, appeared on the platform. No one would have suspected his blindness, save for the rigid expression of his eyes, and the fact that he was led by a fair-haired young woman, who was said to be his wife.

“No wonder he produces such a striking impression,” remarked a young man to his neighbor; “he has an unusually dramatic countenance.”

Indeed, the blind man’s pale face, with that thoughtful set look in the eyes, no less than his entire person, impressed the beholder as something quite remarkable; and his playing confirmed that impression.

A southern Russian audience generally loves and appreciates its national airs; and in this instance even the mixed audience that assembled at the Contracts was at once carried away by the burning torrent of melody which they heard. The marvellous improvisation evoked

by the fingers of the blind musician revealed his keen appreciation of the Nature so familiar to them all, as well as a rare intimacy with the secret springs of national melody. Rich in coloring, graceful and melodious, it gushed forth like a rippling stream, — rising, now into a song of triumph, then again lapsing into a plaintive and sympathetic murmur. At times it was as if a storm were thundering in the sky, echoing through space; and the next moment the music changed to the whistling of the wind through the grass over the mounds of the wild steppes, reviving vague dreams of the past.

When the player ceased, the deafening applause of the delighted audience filled the great hall. The blind man sat with drooping head, listening in surprise to those unfamiliar sounds. But when he raised his hands and again struck the keys, silence fell at once upon the vast hall.

At this moment Maxim entered. He gazed attentively at this crowd, which controlled by

one emotion sat with burning, eager eyes riveted upon the blind man. As the old man listened, he dreaded lest this powerful improvisation, now flowing so freely from the musician's soul, might suddenly end, as it used of old, in a distressing and unsatisfied question, — thus opening a fresh wound in the heart of his blind pupil. But the sounds increased in volume and power, growing more and more imperious, as they touched the hearts of the sympathetic and expectant audience. And the longer Maxim listened, the stronger grew his assurance that he recognized something familiar in the blind man's playing. Yes, it was that noisy street. A clear, resonant, and buoyant wave rolls dashing along, sparkling and breaking up into a thousand sounds. Now it rises and swells, now it recedes with a faint, remote, but continuous murmur, — always calm, picturesquely impassive, cold and indifferent.

Suddenly Maxim's heart sank within him. Again came the well-known wail from the pres-

sure of the musician's fingers. It escaped, echoed through space, and was lost in the air. But it was no longer the moan of individual sorrow, the utterance of a blind man's egotistical suffering. Tears sprang into the old man's eyes, and tears stood also in those of his neighbors, while above the picturesque, impassioned tumult of the street rose the intensely woful heart-rending note of lamentation. Maxim recognized in it the pathetic song of the blind, — "Give to the blind ! — for Christ's sake !" It fell like a stroke of lightning on the heads of the assembled multitude, and every heart throbbed in unison with the expiring wail.

For some time after the music ceased, the audience, seized with horror at the awful realities of life, sat silent and motionless.

The old veteran bowed his head. "Yes, he sees at last. A perception of the woes of the world has taken the place of his former blind, unquenchable, selfish suffering. He feels, he

sees ; and his hands are endowed with a mighty power."

The old soldier bent his head lower and lower. His task was accomplished ; his life had not been in vain. Those full powerful tones, as they echoed through the hall, taking possession of the audience, bore witness to this truth.

This was the *début* of the blind musician.



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Daguer

